

**51st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
26 February to 9 March 2007**

**High Level Round Table on the Elimination of all forms of
discrimination and violence against the girl child**

26 February 2007

Moderators' Summary

1. At its second meeting, on 26 February 2007, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level round table on the priority theme “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child” to follow-up on actions taken subsequent to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the consideration of the situation of the girl child by the Commission at its 43rd session. The interactive high-level round table focused on experiences, lessons learned and good practices, including results with supporting data where available, in relation to the implementation of previous commitments with regard to the priority theme. A discussion guide (E/CN.6/2007/CRP.4) provided the framework for the interactive dialogue.
2. The high level round table was organized in two parallel sessions in order to allow for interaction among the large number of participants. The sessions were chaired, respectively, by H.E Carmen María Gallardo, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, and Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations. The dialogue followed a format consisting of two segments. The first segment was devoted to a dialogue among representatives of Member States who exchanged information on the progress made in their respective countries to end all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child and made proposals for future action. In the second segment, representatives of United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations, and two girl children contributed to the discussion.
3. A total of 71 speakers participated in the high-level round table: 58 Government representatives, six representatives of United Nations entities, five representatives of non-governmental organizations, and two girl children.
4. Participants agreed that discrimination and violence against girl children constituted a violation of their human rights and that it was important to secure an environment conducive to protecting and promoting girls' human rights. Ministries, gender units within line ministries, inter-ministerial committees, commissions, national

observatories and other institutional mechanisms had been set up to promote gender equality, protect the rights of the girl child and implement gender mainstreaming in a wide range of areas, such as girls' education, trafficking, domestic violence, child labour and early marriages. Committees on child labour and ombudsmen for children had also been established. These bodies were mandated to implement and monitor national plans of action, strategies, policies, and programmes to combat discrimination and violence against women and girls.

5. Participants described efforts to sensitize the judiciary, law enforcement agents, and the general public, as well as girls themselves, on the human rights of girls. Media campaigns, conferences, seminars and debates were used to develop awareness of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Specific attention was devoted to the rights of particularly vulnerable groups of girls, including girls with disabilities, indigenous girls, migrant girls, girls living in rural areas, refugee and internally displaced girls, nomadic girls, street girl children and girls in conflict with the law.

6. Although the Education For All Campaign launched by UNESCO had improved girls' access to primary school education, participants noted that gender inequality continued, in particular at the secondary level. Initiatives had been taken in the formal and informal education sectors, including legislative measures and action plans; the building of schools, including mobile schools; the abolition of school fees; stipend programmes for girls; and the provision of school lunches. Efforts to combat gender stereotyping in schools, including through gender analysis of textbooks and information campaigns, were under way in many countries.

7. Physical and psychological violence in schools was raised by participants as a serious concern, affecting girls' school attendance and drop out rates. Further research on this area was called for. A number of countries were implementing plans of action directed towards the elimination of violence and sexual harassment in schools and had established mechanisms, such as observatories, to monitor violence in schools.

8. Teenage pregnancy and early childbirth were raised as serious constraints to the educational achievement of girls in several countries. Interventions focused on the retention of girls in school, re-admission and/or training of girls who left school prematurely, and the revision of education laws to ensure the enforcement of compulsory and free education.

9. Child labour was identified as one of the hidden forms of violence against girls. For many girls, domestic and other forms of labour involved long working hours, limited or no contact with families or communities, a lack of legal and regulatory protective frameworks, and exposure to violence and sexual exploitation. Participants reported on efforts to penalize child labour by amending existing legislation and/or introducing new legislation, and noted the importance of harmonizing legal and policy measures with international conventions on child labor. The need for education and awareness raising on the rights of child workers, and the provision of income-generating alternatives for families with working children, was noted.

11. Even in countries where girls had higher educational levels than boys, the unequal distribution of household responsibilities between men and women contributed to gender segregation in the labour market and high gender wage gaps. Participants requested increased sharing of good practice examples in this regard. Political reforms were needed to promote equal sharing of domestic responsibilities between women and men. Participants noted that infrastructural investments and the adoption of labour and energy saving technologies could contribute to releasing girls from time-consuming tasks.

12. The need to address harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), was raised by many participants. Initiatives undertaken included legislative measures to ban early marriage and FGM/C, awareness-raising programmes in the community, including through the targeting of traditional leaders, the education of girls on their rights; and the adoption of action plans to combat harmful traditional practices. It was noted that religion and culture should not be invoked to justify the continuation of harmful traditional practices and other forms of violence against girls, and that inter-cultural dialogues should be fostered to promote girls' rights.

13. Participants reported that little attention was paid to certain forms of discrimination and violence against very young girls, such as pre-natal sex selection, female infanticide and gender discrimination in nutrition and care-giving behaviours. Action undertaken to address these forms of violence included legislative measures banning identification of the sex of a foetus prior to birth, and the criminalization of sex-selective abortion.

14. Participants noted increasing awareness of the prevalence of violence committed against girls, including sexual abuse and psychological violence, and the need to strengthen actions to combat such violence. Legal measures, including the enactment and amendment of laws, clearer legal definitions, severe punishments for perpetrators, and training and sensitization of legal, judicial and law enforcement personnel, as well as education and health sector workers, were reported as critical.

15. Some countries had carried out studies to measure the impact of domestic violence on children in order to better design prevention strategies. Specific laws to prevent and combat domestic violence had been adopted which banned physical punishment of children as a disciplinary measure and increased penalties for committing crimes against family members. Participants also drew attention to the need for more effective strategies to combat crimes committed in the name of honour, including by examining the root causes of such crimes.

16. Other actions undertaken to combat violence against girls included multi-sectoral action plans; task forces involving both governmental and non-governmental bodies; one-stop crisis centers; shelters; rehabilitation services for victims and perpetrators; telephone hotlines; awareness-raising and sensitization efforts involving men and boys; and the promotion of a national dialogue on violence. Participants noted that policies, plans and programmes had to be constantly monitored to ensure effective implementation.

17. Many participants committed to combating trafficking in women and girls, including for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, illegal adoption, and illegal trade in organs. Initiatives reported in this area included the adoption of legal and policy measures, national action plans, and bilateral and multilateral agreements to combat trafficking. Perpetrators of trafficking were subject to increased punishment, especially when crimes were committed against minors. Efforts to support victims, including the establishment of shelters and one-stop crisis centres, and the implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes were also reported. Participants noted the need for targeted resources for anti-trafficking initiatives, and for improved data collection and analysis.

18. Pedophilia and Internet pornography gave rise to serious concerns among participants. It was noted that cooperation with the media was critical in the fight against pedophilia. Participants stressed the need to ensure that children could safely access the Internet. In this regard, some Governments had implemented strict penalties for acts committed through mobile phones and the Internet.

19. The persistence of conflict, foreign occupation, and economic embargoes was raised as a major impediment to the advancement of the girl-child in some parts of the world. The violence experienced by girl-child soldiers and the lack of adequate support frameworks, due, inter alia, to the breakdown of traditional family and community structures in times of conflict was highlighted. Full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security at all levels was recognized as paramount for addressing discrimination and violence against girls in foreign occupation and conflict and post-conflict situations.

20. Participants noted a number of health problems faced by girls, including lack of access to reproductive health and family planning services, teenage pregnancy and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Initiatives taken to improve the health and well-being of the girl-child included awareness-raising campaigns, educational programmes, legal reform, distribution of contraceptives, and establishment of family planning centers. The need to disaggregate relevant maternal and child health indicators and data by age and by sex was noted. The promotion of gender-sensitive parenting and adequate care of girls in families and communities was raised.

21. Participants stressed the relationship between violence, discrimination and HIV/AIDS, and the particular vulnerability to HIV/AIDS of girls living in poverty. The specific needs of the girl child should be incorporated into HIV/AIDS policies and programmes. It was noted that girls' education and economic empowerment helped to reduce their risk of HIV infection. The responsibility borne by girls, particularly orphaned girls, in caring for the sick and dying in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic was recognized.

22. Participants raised a number of challenges to full implementation of global policy and legal frameworks. Not all countries had adopted laws to combat discrimination and

violence against girls, and where laws existed, they were not always effectively enforced. Emphasis was placed on the importance of adopting laws in conformity with international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as regional instruments.

23. Participants agreed that collaboration between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be enhanced.

24. The persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deeply rooted stereotypes regarding the roles of boys and girls in society was a continuing challenge to the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child and empowerment of girls. Participants called for comprehensive education and awareness raising programmes targeting girls and boys, as well as women and men, to change discriminatory stereotypes and allow girls to enjoy their rights. Media was raised as an important mechanism for raising public awareness, but participants also noted that media could perpetuate negative stereotypes.

25. Gender equality policies and strategies had been adopted or modified in many countries to give greater attention to the need to more actively involve men and boys in eliminating discrimination and violence against women and girls. Participants noted, however, that greater efforts were needed in this area.

26. Participants stressed that poverty reduction strategies and programmes must incorporate explicit attention to the needs of the girl child. Strategies and programmes that benefited especially vulnerable groups of girls, including street girls and migrant girls, had already been developed in some countries. These included the provision of credit, employment and training, and improvements to infrastructure. Women's poverty was identified as an obstacle to the realization of girls' rights since disempowered women were less likely to have the opportunity to participate in decisions related to the education of their children.

27. Participants considered the lack of financial resources a challenge to eliminating discrimination and violence against girls. They called for gender-responsive and child-sensitive budgeting and specific attention to the needs of the girl child in development assistance.

28. Participants noted the need to strengthen the collection of sex-disaggregated data in order to more systematically and effectively measure the extent of discrimination and violence suffered by girls and to inform the development of policies and programmes in this area.. Initiatives undertaken included the development of comprehensive databases and methodologies for data collection. Participants called for the use of surveys to collect data on violence against the girl child, since reporting by victims of violence was minimal or non-existent in many countries.

29. The valuable contribution of civil society in combating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child, particularly through awareness-raising and community mobilization, was recognized. Non-governmental organizations had successfully advocated for the adoption of laws and policies to protect the rights of women and girls and eliminate violence against them.

30. The role of the private sector was also stressed. For example, in one country major information and communication technology companies had voluntarily agreed to control Internet users' access to sexual content.

31. Many participants noted successful collaboration with entities of the United Nations system and stressed the need for continued partnerships. The importance of increasing the provision of resources to achieve the Millennium Development Goals was raised as a means to eliminate discrimination and violence against girls.

32. The high-level round table was also addressed by two girl-children who presented the views and recommendations of over 1,300 young people from 59 countries on discrimination and violence against girls, collected through a survey carried out by UNICEF. The girls noted that their views were seldom taken into account when decisions were made on matters affecting them and called for more interaction with decision-makers. While stressing that governments had the main responsibility for the protection of girls and the elimination of violence and discrimination against the girl child, they noted the important roles that families and communities should play. They called for the creation of safe spaces that allowed girls from different backgrounds to come together locally, nationally and globally, as well as for support for youth organizations, to implement peer-to-peer programmes and non-formal education.

33. The exchange of knowledge and experiences among high-level representatives of Member States, representatives of entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, and two girl children, was recognized as a valuable contribution towards the consideration of the theme of the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child by the Commission.