



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
18 December 2006

Original: English

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-first session**

26 February-9 March 2007

Agenda item 3 (a)

**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**

### **Discussion guide on the high-level round table Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child**

#### **Note by the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **I. Background**

1. In order to further develop opportunities for sharing national experience, in particular with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and to enhance its working methods, the Commission on the Status of Women decided at its forty-sixth session, in 2002, to introduce the option of high-level round tables (decision 46/101). It also authorized the Bureau to decide, after consultation with all interested Member States through regional groups, on the number, timing and theme of any such round tables.

#### **II. Organizational matters**

##### **Theme**

2. At its fiftieth session, in March 2006, the Commission on the Status of Women decided that the annual interactive high-level round table would focus on experiences, lessons learned and good practices, including results with supporting data, where available, in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme (see Economic and Social Council



resolution 2006/9, para. 4). In accordance with the Commission's 2007 priority theme, this high-level round table will focus on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

#### **Participants**

3. The high-level round table will provide an opportunity for dialogue among high-level representatives, including ministers of women's affairs, heads of national machineries for the advancement of women, heads of women's/gender equality commissions and senior officials from other relevant ministries and statistical offices who will be attending the fifty-first session of the Commission. The high-level round table will be open to other members of the Commission and observers. A number of invited senior officials from entities of the United Nations system and representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council will have an opportunity to participate in the dialogue.

#### **Timing**

4. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 26 February 2007, from 3 to 6 p.m.

#### **Format**

5. The high-level round table will be chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission, Carmen María Gallardo (El Salvador).

6. In order to promote the interactivity of the round table, the Chairperson will guide the discussions in a proactive manner. Interventions shall not exceed three minutes. Speakers are also encouraged to pose questions and offer comments on presentations and interventions made. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

7. The first half of the high-level round table should consist of a discussion among high-level representatives from capitals; during the second half, senior officials of the United Nations system and representatives of non-governmental organizations will be invited to participate in the debate.

#### **Outcome**

8. A Chairperson's summary of the high-level round table will be prepared for inclusion in the report of the Commission on its fifty-first session.

### **III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table**

#### **A. Background**

9. The right of girls to equal treatment and opportunities has been on the international agenda since the 1990 World Summit for Children. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, included the girl child among its 12 critical areas of concern and outlined strategies for achieving the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls.

10. Subsequently, at its forty-second session, in 1998, the Commission on the Status of Women considered the issue of the girl child, focusing in particular on

adolescent girls, owing to the increased vulnerability to discrimination and violence among girls in this age group. The conclusions of the Commission (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/12) proposed further actions and initiatives to achieve the elimination of discrimination against girls.

11. Reviews undertaken in 2000 and 2005 of the implementation of goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action indicated that progress had been made in improving the situation of the girl child, in particular with respect to the adoption and strengthening of laws protecting the rights of girls. Significant challenges remained, however, in applying those laws in practice and in achieving gender equality. Most recently, the United Nations study on violence against children and the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women highlighted particular forms of violence against girls, including early and forced marriage, genital mutilation, forms of sexual violence and forced prostitution. Both studies indicated that violence was likely to occur in the family and in community and educational settings.

12. The near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child — both of which provide the most comprehensive legal protection for the girl child — is a promising sign. However, there is an urgent need to “domesticate” the Conventions and to remove national laws that contradict the rights and obligations set out therein. Closer cooperation between their monitoring bodies would considerably increase attention to, and have a positive impact on, the human rights of the girl child at the international level.

13. At the policy and programmatic levels, the needs of girls are often subsumed under the larger categories of “women” or “children”. As a result, the girl child often remains invisible and her needs remain insufficiently addressed. In addition, groups of girls, such as adolescents aged 10-14, girls in conflict and post-conflict situations and girls infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are at particular risk of discrimination and violence and often are the most underserved by policy interventions.

14. Discriminatory stereotypical attitudes and behaviours continue to have a negative impact on the status and treatment of girls. For example, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage, child labour and sexual violence continue to affect a large number of girls throughout the world.

15. The lack of data disaggregated by sex and age is a serious constraint to formulating and implementing effective and targeted policies and programmes, as well as to monitoring progress in the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Existing national-level statistics often mask persistent discrimination and violence against girls at the subnational or local level, particularly in respect of child labour and conflict- and post-conflict situations.

## **B. Discussion guide**

16. During the round table, high-level representatives, including ministers of women's affairs and heads of national machineries for the advancement of women, heads of women's/gender equality commissions and senior officials from other

relevant ministries, will focus on lessons learned, challenges and good practices with supporting data, where available, in respect of the implementation of commitments on the priority theme. Participants may wish to consider:

(a) How are international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, being used at the national and local levels to protect the rights of the girl child and to prevent discrimination and violence?

(b) What initiatives are being taken nationally and locally to develop increased awareness of the various levels of discrimination and violence faced by girls in the home, community and society at large?

(c) What type of methodological approaches are used to ensure quality data to guide national policies and programmes and monitor progress in addressing violence against girls? In what areas is there a need for further indicators to accurately assess the situation of the girl child?

(d) What constraints and challenges are faced at the national level in addressing discrimination and violence against girls, particularly within the context of harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage and child labour and trafficking, and what are good practices for overcoming those constraints and challenges?

(e) How can adequate consultation with and involvement of women's groups and networks and access to their experience, knowledge base and expertise be ensured?

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