

10 March 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women**Fifty-third session**

2-13 March 2009

Agenda item 3 (a) (i)

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: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

High-level round table on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Moderator’s summary

1. At its second meeting, on 2 March 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level round table on the priority theme “Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS” 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. 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 the previous commitments with regard to the priority theme. A discussion guide 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 Olivier Belle, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, and Park In-kook, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations. The dialogue followed a format consisting of two segments. In the first segment, representatives of Member States exchanged information on the progress made in their countries with respect to implementation at the national level



of commitments on the priority theme and made proposals for future action. In the second segment, invited representatives of United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations contributed to the interactive dialogue.

3. A total of 61 speakers made interventions in the high-level round table: 53 Government representatives, 1 representative of a regional group, 3 representatives of United Nations entities and 4 representatives of non-governmental organizations.

4. Participants highlighted a number of international commitments and obligations on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. These include commitments from the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, as well as the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women since 1996. The Monterrey Consensus, adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, included commitments linked to caregiving, social protection and the distribution of paid and unpaid labour. International human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, confirm the obligation of States parties to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. The International Labour Organization Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) addresses States' obligation to assist women and men workers in reconciling employment and family responsibilities and provides guidance on policies and measures.

5. Participants noted that the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men was directly linked to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. They stressed the importance of ratification of international instruments most pertinent to the issue, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and of the effective implementation of all international commitments and obligations. They highlighted the importance of strong legislative and policy frameworks for the promotion of gender equality and elimination of discrimination and violence against women. Participants pointed out that in many instances, specific legislation to facilitate the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men existed but had not been fully implemented. They emphasized the need for mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of laws and policies, as well as the need for political leadership and support to close the gap between existing legislation and policies and their practical implementation.

6. The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men had implications for a range of policy areas, including health, social welfare, family, education and the labour market, and required a complex set of policy responses as well as a large number of initiatives to ensure that policies were translated into reality. A multidisciplinary approach and coordination at the national level were therefore also crucial. The importance of international cooperation and support for developing countries was highlighted.

7. Participants recognized that discriminatory socio-cultural practices and beliefs and stereotypes that impede the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment were among the main obstacles to the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Unequal power relations between women

and men perpetuated gender stereotypes, and stereotypical views on the roles of men created social barriers to men's and boys' sharing of responsibilities in the home and for the care of persons, including as caregivers for HIV/AIDS. Such stereotypes also determined the type of work performed by women and men. Participants recognized that the media played a major role in promoting stereotypes but also in eliminating them. Efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes should also be undertaken through non-formal and formal education. In this regard, participants stressed the importance of developing gender-sensitive curriculums, textbooks, projects and manuals that promoted gender equality and women's human rights. The socialization of children that emphasized equality between women and men was critical.

8. Participants agreed that changing people's perceptions about ascribed gender roles was critical to eliminating stereotypes. The critical role of men and boys in this effort was emphasized. Women continued to encounter gender-stereotypical expectations when they assumed key positions in society. Participants highlighted examples of community projects and programmes aimed at eliminating stereotypes, including open discussions on "taboo" subjects. Faith-based initiatives, at the grass-roots level, were also being undertaken to combat gender stereotypes.

9. Participants recognized that women's lack of or limited exercise of reproductive rights could exacerbate domestic and care-giving responsibilities. Participants agreed that the unequal sharing had also to be examined in relation to factors such as race and class in order to fully understand and address the situation of different groups of women. Issues such as poverty, urbanization and the challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic had to be addressed in an integrated manner in order to create an enabling environment for equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

10. Participants noted that women's access to the labour market and decision-making processes remained constrained by expectations that women were responsible for domestic and care work. Unpaid work at household level, including caregiving, remained invisible and unmeasured and its contribution to economic and social development had not been adequately recognized and valued in economic terms. Financial crises tended to increase the caring burden on women as they had to take on additional responsibilities in response to reduced public spending for health care and education.

11. Participants acknowledged that women's participation in the labour market made good economic sense. The unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women continued, however, to limit women's ability to undertake paid work and forced many women into informal, part-time or temporary work. Women's participation in paid work had not resulted in a reduced burden of unpaid work. During global crises, such as the current financial crisis, employers may no longer consider work-life balance issues as a priority.

12. Participants supported the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities for the achievement of gender equality goals and economic development. They discussed examples of policy and legislative interventions and programmes and services developed to enable women and men to reconcile family and work responsibilities, such as flexible working arrangements, maternal, paternal and parental leave provisions and the provision of affordable childcare and elder care services. Progress, however, had been limited as evidence indicated that men rarely took up flexible working arrangements and parental leave. Participants also

acknowledged that many such policies had been directly targeted at women, thus potentially reinforcing the unequal sharing of responsibilities and care work. Revisions to pension and tax systems to promote equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women and increase women's participation in the labour market had also been implemented. Participants emphasized the need to address the persistent gender wage gap in the labour market.

13. Participants acknowledged that households in developing countries spent more time in unpaid work, such as collecting water and firewood, cleaning, cooking and caring for children, the sick and the elderly. Evidence suggested that the amount of unpaid work increased with the poverty level of the household. The hiring of domestic workers, mostly migrant women from rural areas or other countries, was a common strategy for better-off households to reduce women's burden of domestic and care work.

14. Participants emphasized that caregiving was a social responsibility that contributed to the well-being of societies. The State should play an active role in redistributing responsibilities between men and women, as well as in reducing the total burden of unpaid work. In that regard, the importance of investing in physical and social infrastructure, including public service provision, and in the care economy was highlighted. The State could also highlight the value of care work, seek to improve remuneration for such work and support the development of the skills and education required for such work.

15. Participants discussed the implications of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, particularly in the area of caregiving. Women and girls often had to assume the major responsibility of care for people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly in countries with weak health systems. Participants noted the critical role of home-based caregivers, whether family members or volunteers, who often worked with little or no training, with limited support from the public sector and without the basic equipment needed to safely perform their tasks. Some examples of men providing home-based care for relatives living with HIV/AIDS were provided. Participants suggested that there was a need for increased involvement of all stakeholders in care work — the State, the private sector, civil society and households — especially with regard to HIV/AIDS.

16. Participants discussed ways to enhance the role of men and boys in sharing care and other unpaid work responsibilities. Pilot programmes were in place to promote active and responsible fatherhood, raise awareness and support young fathers, including through networks. These initiatives should be expanded in order to enhance the role of men and boys in household work and caregiving and to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life for both women and men, and women should support men's involvement. The need for men to take greater responsibility for protection against HIV transmission was underscored. The role of men and boys in eliminating violence against women was also raised.

17. Participants recognized that gaps in data collection and analysis contributed to the invisibility and continuing undervaluation of unpaid work, in particular in systems of national accounts. Participants emphasized the need for data collection on unpaid work for effective and targeted policymaking. In that regard, the value of time-use surveys was highlighted. Participants agreed that data and information on home-based care was greatly needed. Such information should be compiled in relevant databases.

18. Participants acknowledged the critical role of partnerships between government, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in the promotion of gender equality and equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care work. Such partnerships had been effective in addressing gender stereotypes and in the provision of services. For example, non-governmental organizations were instrumental in supporting people living with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS and in meeting the increased need for care caused by the pandemic.
