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

2-13 March 2009

Agenda item 3 (c)

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”: gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters**Panel discussion on capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS****Moderator’s summary**

1. At its fourth meeting, on 3 March 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive expert panel discussion on the topic “Capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”.
2. The panel, moderated by Enna Park (Republic of Korea), Vice-Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, was composed of the following experts: Heisoo Shin, Visiting Professor, Ewha Women’s University, Seoul; Giedre Purvaneckiene, Associate Professor, University of Vilnius; Gary Barker, Senior Technical Adviser on Gender, Violence and Rights at the International Center for Research on Women, Washington, D.C., and co-Coordinator of the MenEngage Alliance; Bafana Khumalo, co-founder and co-Director, Sonke Gender Justice Network, South Africa; and Naomi Cassirer, Senior Technical Specialist, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, International Labour Organization (ILO).
3. Participants reaffirmed global commitments and normative frameworks on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including in the context of HIV/AIDS. The relevance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was noted. A number of ILO instruments were discussed, including the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention



(No. 156) and its accompanying recommendation (No. 165), which provide specific guidance on policies and measures needed to assist both women and men workers to reconcile employment and family responsibilities. The ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008) reaffirms the centrality of gender equality as an objective and a means of social justice. Participants emphasized the importance of strong national legislative and policy frameworks for the promotion of gender equality. A number of participants drew attention to their countries' national policies, action plans and legislation for gender equality and empowerment of women.

4. Participants discussed how the organization of work, unpaid and paid, had led to gender inequality and noted its cost to women in the form of limited opportunities for employment and political participation. Available data and research had demonstrated the vast inequalities and imbalances that exist between women and men. Care work was often not paid, and in many instances it was not even considered work. It was acknowledged that insufficient efforts had been made to recognize the value of unpaid domestic and care work, which is not accounted for in gross domestic products, and to reflect the value in systems of national accounts, laws and policies. Poor households were particularly affected by inadequate policy responses and lack of services, as they had the weakest economic means to purchase goods (such as prepared foods or time-saving devices) or services (such as private-care services or domestic help) to help them balance their economic and care responsibilities. Participants noted that lack of recognition of care work in general was reflected in many paid care professions, including in terms of working conditions and pay. Participants stressed that care had not received sufficient attention on the global policy agenda.

5. Participants drew attention to a number of trends that have important policy implications. In particular, the profound changes in the world of work and in families had increasingly constrained families' ability to balance care responsibilities with economic activities. Urbanization, migration, changes in family structures and women's increased labour-force participation in developed and developing countries alike had made traditional family support for care less available. In some regions the number of women-headed households had increased dramatically. In parts of the Latin American region, for example, women headed one in every three households. Ageing populations in some societies had increased the number of elderly requiring care, and the HIV/AIDS and other health pandemics had placed greater caregiving demands on families, especially women and girls in poor households. Furthermore, in many societies, public services had been cut back, placing even greater demands on women and girls to provide unpaid care.

6. Participants agreed that the HIV/AIDS pandemic exacerbated the inequalities in caregiving between women and men. In many developing countries and countries with high HIV/AIDS infection rates, lack of access to services and treatment, as well as poorly developed infrastructure, was a serious problem. Participants pointed out that the HIV/AIDS epidemic disproportionately affected women's lives in terms of both rates of infection and the burden of care and support they bore for those with AIDS-related illnesses. Where the public health services had been unable to cope with the demand for care, the burden of care had shifted to different generations of women in households and home-based care organizations. Participants drew attention to a number of promising initiatives. For example, the involvement of men in national programmes and campaigns to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and

other sexually transmitted illnesses had helped educate the public on men's roles and responsibilities. Participants agreed that more efforts were needed in the area of prevention, such as efforts to disseminate information on sexually transmitted illnesses and increased condom use. Participants emphasized that Governments needed to do more in the area of providing health services, and that more resources were needed.

7. Participants discussed the role of gender stereotyping in perpetuating the unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men and its contribution to unequal access to opportunities, including in education, employment and political participation. Gender stereotypes had contributed to women bearing a disproportionate burden of household and caregiving responsibilities, regardless of their socio-economic status and involvement in both formal and informal employment. In addition, in many societies women were less valued and violence against women was widely accepted. Men, on the other hand, were viewed as full-time breadwinners and deficient caregivers.

8. To address gender stereotypes, participants stressed that solutions must include sustained activities to move people's mindsets towards more egalitarian gender roles. Several good practices were highlighted, including developing and enforcing legislation prohibiting discrimination and stereotypes; changing negative sayings/proverbs into more positive ones; implementing targeted awareness-raising campaigns; and engaging educational institutions, the media, religious and community leaders and civil society in challenging stereotypes. A number of countries had established awards for individuals, companies and institutions that promoted gender equality and the elimination of stereotypes. The importance of role models was also stressed. The decision of the Prime Minister of Norway to take one month's paternity leave was noted as an important example. The need to address harmful customary and traditional practices, such as early marriage, was also raised. Participants stressed in particular the role and influence of the media, including in portraying positive images of both women and men as caregivers. It was noted that mass media efforts were most successful when combined with targeted outreach efforts, for example in schools, the workplace or local community groups.

9. To address care needs and persisting inequalities and imbalances in the division of work between women and men, participants noted that strong policy and legislative measures were required in a range of areas, such as social protection, the labour market, health, education and infrastructure. Participants emphasized the need to discuss how policies were developed. It was noted, for example, that many health and social policies ignored the role of fathers and the caregiving responsibilities of men, thus reinforcing the stereotype of women as caregivers. For example, in some countries, family-policy measures were based on the goal of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, while in others policy measures had rather been informed by notions of men "assisting" women.

10. Participants stressed the need to do more to engage men and boys in caregiving at the household level and in paid care work. The importance of promoting active and responsible fatherhood was discussed. While some men were increasing their participation in childcare, the involvement of men remained relatively low overall. A number of examples of ways to positively engage men and boys were provided, such as encouraging men's involvement in childbirth and prenatal care, scaling up fatherhood preparation courses and providing opportunities

for boys to participate in caring work in various settings of socialization, including in the home, schools, and religious institutions. Several countries involved men in national awareness-raising campaigns on the role of men in promoting gender equality, and on issues such as violence against women. These initiatives resulted in a change in attitudes and in increased participation in care work at home by men and boys. Another key benefit of men's involvement in care work was the promotion of gender equality among children. Participants highlighted the need to bring such good practices to scale and to share them with policymakers.

11. Several challenges to engaging men and boys were pointed out. Prenatal clinics often were either unwilling or ill-equipped to handle men's involvement. Some men engaging in domestic work gained little or no social recognition for their work, and, on the contrary, were shunned by their peers. It was pointed out that in some cases, rather than decreasing the burden of work in the home, the presence of a man in the household could lead to an increase in the amount of domestic work that women carry out.

12. Participants agreed on the importance of public policies to promote men's involvement in caregiving. The lack of attention to men's role in such policies reflected pessimism by policymakers on men's capacity to provide care, which needed to be overcome. Several participants pointed out that more research was needed on both opportunities and challenges for men's and boys' increased involvement in caregiving, including studies on how men spend their time during paternity and parental leave.

13. Efforts to establish and expand different leave benefits, social protection measures (such as health insurance, pensions and family allowances) and public services in various regions were discussed. There is great variation between countries and regions in the scope of such measures, in terms of length of leave and payment provided. Expansion of care services, including childcare, as well as investment in infrastructure to free up time for other pursuits, including in education, training and employment, was considered of critical importance.

14. Women were more likely than men to use leave benefits as well as flexible work arrangements, including part-time work opportunities. Participants noted that the longer the leave, the greater the likelihood of women being considered secondary wage earners. To attract men to childcare, a number of countries used the so-called "father's quota" in parental leave, meaning that some part of the leave should be taken only by the father or it would be lost to the family. Rates of leave taken by men had increased with the introduction of such measures, and participants stressed the importance of monitoring those rates.

15. The rights and working conditions of paid care workers, including domestic workers, were discussed. It was noted that there were approximately 100 million domestic workers worldwide, many from vulnerable groups. Often these workers had very poor working conditions and struggled to cope with their own family responsibilities. The need to improve the recognition, value and oversight of paid domestic work was emphasized. This required increased attention to domestic workers' rights to decent work. These issues were on the standard-setting agenda of the International Labour Conference.

16. Participants emphasized that policies and programmes must be grounded in the everyday lives and realities of women, men, girls and boys. It was recognized that

stronger efforts must be made to involve all relevant stakeholders, including caregivers and care recipients, at all levels of decision-making. In particular, the need for the increased involvement in care work of all stakeholders, including States, the private sector, civil society organizations and community groups, was emphasized. The burden of care could not be left to households, in particular women and girls, alone.

17. It was noted that designing policies and measures that effectively mainstreamed gender equality objectives required the commitment of key actors such as Governments, the private sector and trade unions. It also required sustained resource commitments to social sectors. The use of tools such as time-use surveys to inform policymaking had to be further explored. Multisectoral responses, partnerships and enhanced coordination were needed. Participants pointed out that good policy initiatives and measures taken in the public sector needed to be replicated in the private and informal sectors. The important role of civil society and women's organizations in promoting accountability and in monitoring the implementation of commitments made at the global and national levels was pointed out.

18. Participants discussed efforts made and challenges in building capacity for mainstreaming gender perspectives into laws, policies and programmes. ILO had developed a range of tools, such as the participatory gender audit, to provide guidance for policy and action. Various country and regional examples were provided by participants, including gender-impact assessments of laws and policies; the introduction of gender-based analysis across all government sectors; efforts to collect and monitor sex- and age-disaggregated data; the conduct of time-use surveys; and gender-responsive budgeting. The need to scale up and improve these efforts and to exchange information about available tools, standards, methodologies and gender-sensitive indicators, as well as good practices and lessons learned, was emphasized.

19. Participants expressed concern that tensions arising from the balance between work and family were likely to worsen in the wake of the financial crisis. Past experience demonstrated that financial downturns tended to hit women harder than men, because pre-crisis gender inequality in the home and in the labour market placed women in already vulnerable positions because of their weaker control over property and resources, lower employment rates, concentration in informal and vulnerable forms of employment with lower earnings and lesser social protection. The quality and availability of public services also tended to decrease with the fiscal austerity measures that resulted, devolving greater care responsibilities to the family and adding to the unpaid household work of women and girls. Experiences during the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s, for example, showed that achievements in gender equality and empowerment of women could be eroded. Special attention and programmes were required to prevent negative impacts. It was noted that a strong case could be made for stimulus packages to include generous investments in social protections and public services. Public spending on social services was expected to reduce the vulnerability of the population, alleviate unpaid care responsibilities and support employment in the growing sectors of care and education, all of which tended to support the reconciliation of work and family and contribute to greater gender equality, while also making economic sense.