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

2-13 March 2009

Item 3 (b)

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”**Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men****Gender perspectives of the financial crisis****Moderator’s summary**

1. At its 8th meeting, on 5 March 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive expert panel to examine the emerging issue of the gender perspectives of the financial crisis. The session was moderated by Julio Peralta of Paraguay. The panellists included: Ms. Stephanie Seguino, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont, United States of America; Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, New School Graduate Program in International Affairs, New York; Elizabeth Eilor, independent consultant on gender equality and macroeconomics, Uganda; Shamika Sirimanne, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; and Mayra Buvinic, the World Bank, Washington, D.C.

2. Participants noted international commitments and obligations on the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment that were pertinent in the context of the financial crisis. They included commitments from the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), and other intergovernmental processes, including the Millennium Summit (2000) and the International Conference on Financing for Development (2002). Participants acknowledged that financial and economic crises not only involved monetary costs but also affected people’s enjoyment of all human rights, including economic and social rights. The latter were enshrined in article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A number of international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against



Women and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, contained provisions pertaining to the economic rights of women, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was especially pertinent to the protection of the rights of migrant women.

3. Participants acknowledged that the current financial crisis and the resulting economic crisis would have an impact on all countries, while recognizing that that impact would differ between and within countries. It was noted that speculative activities in real estate and financial instruments, unsustainable expansion of credit, stagnation of wages, growing income inequality and insufficient demand for products contributed to the current crisis. As the crisis continued to unfold, its depth and duration were still unknown. Participants recognized the differences between the current crisis and those of the recent past. For example, the Asian economic crisis of the 1990s had been contained within the region and countries had been able to overcome it through export-led growth. Participants were concerned that, currently, developing countries, even those with sound macroeconomic policies, had little control over the cross-country spillover effects of the current financial crisis which had originated elsewhere.

4. Participants were concerned that the crisis, if not addressed effectively, could increase poverty levels and jeopardize future development. It was also noted that minority groups, migrants and immigrants were especially disadvantaged in times of economic crises. Many developing countries did not have the necessary fiscal space to implement stimulus packages. A slowdown in official development assistance (ODA) would impact negatively on the national budgets of developing countries, especially in Africa, and in particular the social sectors that relied more heavily on ODA flows. Participants called for fulfilment by all members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development of their commitments to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to ODA and stressed the importance of making aid more effective given the current financial crisis. Other participants reaffirmed their commitments to ODA for developing countries.

5. It was suggested that the flow of remittances to developing countries, which during past economic downturns had remained steady, could diminish during the current crisis. Concern was also voiced that protectionist measures and restrictive trade policies could impede exports from developing countries and make it more difficult for some countries, especially small and open economies, to emerge from the current crisis.

6. Participants agreed that financial and economic crises had gender-specific impacts and placed a disproportionate burden on women, in particular poor, migrant and minority women. Even though both women and men were affected by job losses, women were often laid off first, as men were traditionally considered to be the main “breadwinners”. While in some countries, traditionally male-dominated sectors were currently experiencing heavy job losses, in other countries jobs were being lost mainly in female-dominated sectors. Cuts in public expenditures in the social sector impacted negatively on the care economy, exacerbating women’s domestic and care-giving responsibilities. Participants noted that women in the informal sector were particularly affected, as economic crises tended to significantly reduce the demand for outputs produced in that sector. Women constituted the

majority of microfinance clients and their access to such credit was also expected to decline owing to the liquidity problems in the financial sector.

7. Participants were concerned about the possible impact of the financial crisis on migrant women, especially those working in the care economy and households of developed economies. In addition to job losses, there was concern about a potential increase in anti-immigrant attitudes. Economic hardship and lack of jobs could also lead to women's increased vulnerability to trafficking.

8. Although food prices had declined somewhat from the peak of the food crisis in 2008, the continuing economic crisis continued to threaten the well-being of women and their families. It was noted that the current crisis could aggravate the vulnerability of some countries, such as those in the Pacific region, to the effects of climate change, especially in sectors such as agriculture and food security, where women would be particularly affected.

9. Participants were concerned that unless the current crisis was contained, a number of countries were unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially those on reducing child mortality, improving maternal mortality and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, the World Bank estimated that if the crisis was not contained, the financial shock would result in 200,000 to 400,000 additional infant deaths per year on average from 2009 to 2015. Research indicated that declines in GDP led to significantly higher average infant mortality of girls than of boys.

10. Participants noted that the financial crisis provided an opportunity for Governments to change the current macroeconomic framework, redirect resources to the productive sector and move away from speculation. In that regard, participants stressed that investing in gender equality also during times of crisis was smart economics.

11. Participants noted that countries had taken a range of measures to respond to the current crisis. Such measures included expansionary fiscal policies to stimulate economic growth and generate employment. Specific measures included investments in physical infrastructure and social protection schemes, including unemployment insurance benefits, training programmes for the unemployed, provision of social services and safety nets, such as cash transfers, subsidies and public works programmes. Targeted initiatives taken by the public and private sector to support women during the financial crisis were highlighted. The World Bank planned to incorporate gender perspectives in its proposed vulnerability fund with priority investments in safety nets and infrastructure, and for microfinance and small- and medium-scale enterprises.

12. Participants emphasized that all policy responses to the financial crisis should be guided by States' obligations under international human rights instruments. Governments should not rely only, or primarily, on macroeconomic policies to correct the global financial crisis; rather, they should take a holistic approach, guided by human rights and human well-being. Responses should be people-centred and focus on employment, sustainability and gender equality, and take account of climate change concerns and the need for food and energy security. They should aim to enhance productivity, in particular in agriculture, a critical sector for women in developing countries. In that regard, participants called for increased spending on agriculture, a sector that was often ignored in policy responses to the crisis.

13. Participants recommended various measures and practical steps to ensure that gender perspectives were incorporated in policy responses to the financial crisis. Gender equality was vital for economic growth, as discrimination against women carried economic costs. Therefore, all forms of de jure and de facto discrimination against women had to be addressed, in particular those that restricted women's rights and opportunities to work. Women's role as economic agents should be enhanced and steps should be taken to increase women's income, which had long-term beneficial impacts for families, households and future generations. There was also a need to strengthen women's entrepreneurship generally, not only in microenterprises and small enterprises.

14. Participants agreed that fiscal stimulus packages should go beyond a focus on job creation in mostly male-dominated sectors, such as construction. They emphasized the need for greater gender-responsiveness that included jobs for women as well as measures to reduce women's caregiving responsibilities. Stimulus packages should therefore aim to invest in the physical as well as social infrastructure, including the care economy. Social sector expenditures, such as for health and education, should be protected and increased.

15. A number of low-cost interventions to prevent and address gender-based discrimination were recommended, such as provision of school lunches and sanitation facilities for girls. There was also a need to consider women's unpaid work as part of efforts to respond to the crisis. While participants recognized the importance of pilot projects for women's economic empowerment, they stressed the need to scale up such projects.

16. Participants stressed the need to integrate a gender perspective in macroeconomic frameworks and, to that end, recommended that gender analysis of economic policies and gender audits be conducted. The systematic use of gender-responsive budgeting was recommended as a strategy for responding to the gender perspectives of the current crisis. A tax on foreign exchange transactions could provide resources for gender-specific programmes and reduce speculative behaviour. Participants suggested that the participation of women in decision-making processes, including financial decision-making, should be prioritized.

17. Participants called for effective monitoring of social spending and for tracking of expenditures, in particular those of stimulus packages, so as to ensure that the needs of women and of vulnerable groups were being addressed during the current crisis. Data collection and the use of data disaggregated by sex to assess the differential impact of the financial crisis on women and men should be enhanced. Time-use surveys should be used to show the scope of women's unpaid work.

18. Participants stressed that all actors, including Governments, central banks and donors had a role to play in efforts to overcome the global financial crisis. The role of central banks should be examined and policy coordination between Governments and central banks enhanced, with a strong emphasis on job creation, in particular for women. States should consider regulatory measures to better align the profit goals of private investors with development goals. Governments should subsidize credit for women and guarantee loans that fostered job creation for women. Commercial banks that received liquidity support from central banks should be requested to maintain funding for microcredit, as such credit was vital in the informal sector where large numbers of women worked. Donors should maintain ODA flows and improve the quality of aid, including reflection of gender perspectives.

19. Participants noted the role of the United Nations as a democratic forum for Heads of State and Government ministers from all sectors, not only finance, to discuss measures that could be taken to overcome the financial crisis and to examine its causes. A more interdisciplinary approach to solving the crisis was recommended. Participants recognized the value of diversity for more effective decision-making processes and called for greater participation of women. In that regard, the participation of women in the Group of 20 meeting, to be held in London in April 2009, to address the impact of the financial crisis, was called for.
