

12 March 2009

Original: English

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

2-13 March 2009

Agenda item 3 (a) (ii)

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: equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels**Moderator’s summary**

1. At its 9th meeting, on 6 March 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels” adopted by the Commission at its fiftieth session in 2006. The interactive dialogue was designed to strengthen the role of the Commission in following up on the implementation of agreed actions on this review theme. The dialogue was opened by two keynote speakers: Anne Marie Goetz, Chief Adviser for Governance, Peace and Security, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and Francisco Cos-Montiel, Senior Programme Specialist, Women’s Rights and Citizenship Programme, International Development Research Centre, Canada. The Chairperson of the Commission, Mr. Olivier Belle, acted as moderator of the meeting. An issues paper provided the framework for the discussion.

Progress made in implementation

2. Participants recognized that women’s full and effective participation in decision-making processes at all levels was crucial to the promotion of gender equality. Political will and leadership were needed to enhance such participation. Implementation of obligations and commitments to women’s participation in decision-making embodied in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council



resolution 1325 (2000) and other policy documents and human rights instruments were critical to achieving this goal.

3. Some progress had been made in implementing the agreed conclusions. There was an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions in the public and private sector. Currently, women exceeded 30 per cent representation in national assemblies in 24 countries with Rwanda taking the lead with 56 per cent of seats occupied by women. The number of women in national parliaments had increased globally from 11.6 per cent of seats in 1995 to 18.4 per cent in 2008. There was also an upward trend in women's participation in academia, local government, civil service and the military. Participants placed particular emphasis on the number of women in the judiciary, where women's leadership was of critical importance in advancing gender equality and women's rights. In the judiciary, a field still heavily male-dominated, the number of women was growing, and women were being appointed to supreme courts and constitutional courts. The number of women on the benches of international courts had also increased.

4. Promising strategies in achieving a gender-balanced representation in all spheres of public life and decision-making included constitutional and legislative amendments to promote the principle of equal rights of women and men. Parity laws contributed to the accelerated achievement of women's equal participation at all levels of decision-making in all branches of government. In some cases, laws also provided for sanctions or established monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance.

5. Temporary measures such as quotas or reserved seats were used to support and encourage women's engagement in electoral processes, political parties and public service. Such quotas, which could range from 10 to 50 per cent, required that a certain percentage of seats in decision-making bodies be held by women. It was noted that 48 countries had some type of quota in place and that most of the 24 countries that had exceeded the 30 per cent mark of female representatives in the national assembly used quota regulations. Participants drew attention to the so-called "40/60" formula, requiring that a minimum of 40 per cent and a maximum of 60 per cent of seats be held by either sex. Quota requirements had been particularly effective in increasing the number of women in politics. In some instances, courts had confirmed the constitutionality of temporary special measures, such as quota laws, for the achievement of equality of women and men. Other strategies included the use of targets and benchmarks to increase the number of women.

6. Participants reported that different strategies were used to increase the number of women in decision-making in the private sector. Such strategies usually recognized companies' accountability to shareholders and sought to achieve desired goals through market-oriented approaches and the voluntary participation of companies. Examples included the use of codes of conduct, public compacts, or "charters", setting clear goals and objectives and requiring practical implementation strategies for the recruitment and promotion of women, in particular to senior levels of management and decision-making. While in some instances, such charters were signed by private sector companies, in other cases both Government agencies and private sector companies were encouraged to join. Other approaches to increasing the number of women on the boards of public or State-owned enterprises or for publicly traded companies included the use of legislation to set mandatory goals for the number of women on boards.

7. Efforts to increase the number of women in public office at the local level, including in local government and local development committees, had also yielded positive results. Such representation enabled women to gain new skills and experience and advanced women's rights. Participants noted the efforts undertaken by trade unions to increase women's participation in leadership, including through reserving a designated number of seats for women, and establishing women's advisory committees.

8. Progress had also been made in providing and implementing capacity-building measures for women aimed at development of skills to seek elected or appointed office. Steps had also been taken to enhance opportunities for women to benefit from leadership training and mentoring once in office in order to increase their effectiveness. Gender-sensitivity training aimed at men in public or political office had also been established to strengthen their awareness and understanding of gender-based discrimination and the importance of women's participation in public life. Steps also aimed to enhance men's role as advocates for gender equality and as mentors for women in leadership positions. Steps had also been taken to increase women's access to funding when seeking political office, for example for election campaigns or for capacity-building.

9. Awareness-raising initiatives on the role of women in public life and decision-making were on the increase. Such efforts, which were aimed at motivating women to seek public office or pursue their professional careers at the highest level of decision-making, also focused on women leaders as important role models for younger women. Communication strategies, aimed at promoting women's rights generally, were also being carried out.

10. Participants stressed the critical role of different stakeholders working together to achieve women's equal participation in decision-making. Cooperation between Governments and the private sector was important, as was the advocacy work of the women's movement and of civil society to enhance women's political representation. Cross-party cooperation between women's organizations had been used successfully to raise issues of concern to women in the political and legislative agenda, and steps had been taken to enhance women's leadership roles through development cooperation.

11. Measures to increase monitoring and reporting on women's participation in decision-making led to greater accountability. Strategies included the requirement for Governments or other designated bodies to report publicly, on an annual basis, on the number of women in all branches of government. Transparent information about private sector commitments to women in leadership positions, including progress made, also enhanced accountability.

12. Participants noted the links between the review theme and the priority theme of the fifty-third session of the Commission. Increased efforts were being made to sensitize men and boys about the importance of women's participation in public life and leadership roles in strengthening democracy for the benefit of society. Measures had been adopted to enhance men's equal sharing of responsibilities for domestic work, including raising and caring for children. The role of the educational system in the elimination of gender-role stereotypes was emphasized.

Gaps and challenges in implementation

13. Despite progress achieved, participants expressed concern about the slow pace of change, and the continuing lack of equal participation of women in all areas, especially in senior management and leadership positions in the private and finance sectors.

14. The persistence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes regarding the roles of women and men was considered to be a significant barrier to achieving equal participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels. Even where women had gained access to decision-making positions in government, these positions, more often than not, dealt with social policies, perceived as “soft” issues, rather than with finance, budget, foreign policy and national security.

15. It was noted that despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), there was a continuing underrepresentation of women in peace negotiations and peace processes. Participants called for increased support to ensure women’s full and equal participation and representation at all decision-making levels in all aspects of peace processes and in post-conflict peacebuilding, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation processes.

16. Balancing domestic and work responsibilities was recognized as essential to women advancing to leadership roles. There was a need to foster an enabling environment for women, including through measures aimed at the equal sharing of family and work obligations between women and men.

17. Other barriers to women’s effective participation in decision-making processes included the low perceived legitimacy and credibility of women in public and political office. Women still had to build constituencies of support and recognition for their achievements in decision-making. Women’s organizations and movements should support women in leadership roles in public office.

18. Recognizing the diversity of women, there was a need to address the specific barriers they faced by different groups of women and for steps to achieve their greater involvement in public life, including women belonging to minorities. Further efforts were also needed to encourage the media to overcome gender bias in reporting about women in decision-making roles.

19. Participants noted the limited availability of statistics on the number of women in many areas of public life and in the private sector. There was also insufficient knowledge about the impact, as well as the quality, of women’s leadership in different policy areas.

20. Participants were concerned about the threat to women’s gains in the area of formal employment posed by the global financial crisis. There were persistent gender equality gaps in education, health and the labour market, and in access to resources, also constituted challenges to women’s participation in decision-making. It was further noted that women who hold or run for political office may be vulnerable to gender-based violence. Full implementation of the agreed conclusions on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes therefore required measures aimed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.