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Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

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: priority theme: elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

High-level round table on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

Chair’s summary

1. On 4 March 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level round table on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. The interactive high-level round table was focused on the sharing of national experiences, lessons learned and good practices. 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. Marjon V. Kamara, Chair of the Commission, and Carlos García González, Vice-Chair, presided over the sessions. The meeting opened with the screening of a short video on the elimination and prevention of violence against women. In total, 68 government representatives made statements, as did representatives from the European Union, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Labour Organization. Invited representatives from the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations responded to the interactive dialogue, namely, Nicole Ameline, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; Kate Gilmore, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund; and Ivy Josiah, Executive Director of the Women’s Aid Organization (Malaysia) and



Regional Council Member of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

3. Participants welcomed the Commission's consideration of the priority theme. The eradication of violence against women and girls continues to be a priority issue at the global, regional and national levels. As a result, the number and types of initiatives have increased significantly, good practices have been identified and multiple stakeholders have been engaged. Despite the progress and achievements accomplished to date, however, violence against women and girls remains prevalent, occurring in all countries and regions, during peace and in conflict, and causing extensive human suffering in terms of individuals, families, communities and societies.

4. Violence against women and girls is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men and of systemic gender-based discrimination. Participants acknowledged the devastating consequences for individuals, families and societies and that much more needs to be done to address the issue. The emergence of new forms and manifestations of violence against women and girls, such as violence perpetrated through new technological and/or electronic means, including cyberstalking and cyberbullying, requires new responses. Certain groups of women and girls continue to be at increased risk of violence, including older women, migrant and indigenous women, women with disabilities, women from rural areas and ethnic minorities, as well as those in situations of conflict and those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

5. Extensive legal and policy reforms have resulted in strengthened and more comprehensive legal and policy frameworks for preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. In this context, the importance of adhering to international and regional instruments concerning women's human rights, in particular the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and of incorporating their provisions into national legislation and policy was emphasized. The importance of regional agreements such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was also highlighted by participants. Political will is critical for implementation at the national level. The sharing of information and the exchange of good practices also enhance implementation.

6. Good practices include provisions of national constitutions that prohibit violence against women and girls; comprehensive legislation on violence against women and girls, that calls for the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators and mandates support and protection for victims/survivors; and prevention measures. Some laws address multiple forms of violence against women and girls, while others focus on one form of violence, such as intimate-partner violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, or child, early and forced marriage. Provincial and local regulations have been promulgated to ensure implementation. States have revised or amended various types of laws, including criminal, family and labour laws, to incorporate provisions concerning one or more forms of violence against women and girls.

7. Dedicated policies, strategies and national action plans on violence against women and girls provide overarching frameworks for enhancing coordination among relevant entities. In some cases, such multisectoral plans have been in place for many years, and have been repeatedly updated, taking into account lessons learned from the implementation of prior plans. Some plans address specific forms of violence, such as domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual harassment or female genital mutilation. Given its many manifestations and its broad impact, violence against women and girls is also being addressed in national action plans on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and on economic and social advancement, as well as in disaster risk reduction strategies.

8. While the importance of adequate legislation and policies is recognized, their effective implementation and enforcement remain a challenge, especially when funding and capacity are insufficient. Despite improvements, particularly in terms of law enforcement and funding, discriminatory attitudes on the part of officials and procedural barriers to women's access to justice continue to contribute to low rates of reporting. Greater efforts are therefore needed in order to ensure adequate funding for the implementation of all laws and policies, including through gender-responsive budgeting; the systematic and sustained capacity-building of those in all sectors responding to violence, including law enforcement and judicial officials, health-care professionals and social workers; the establishment and strengthening of intersectoral institutions to monitor and assess the implementation of laws and policies; and the availability of improved data and indicators for the monitoring of implementation. While many States have appointed specialized prosecutors and have created specialized police units and police focal points, victims/survivors of violence continue to refrain from reporting acts of violence and to lack adequate access to mechanisms for redress. In this respect, working in partnership with civil society and all other stakeholders is essential to ensuring coordinated and sustained action and to promoting greater accountability at all levels in order to prevent and address violence against women.

9. Civil society, in particular women's organizations, plays a crucial role in addressing the scourge of violence against women and girls. Many participants in the high-level round table expressed their appreciation for the valuable role of civil society in responding to and preventing violence against women and girls, in particular its role in providing much-needed services and its active involvement in the development of national action plans, policies and strategies, as well as its active role in the monitoring and evaluation of such plans.

10. Social and cultural patterns of conduct that lead to discrimination and stereotyped roles for women and men can legitimize, exacerbate or cause the toleration of violence against women and girls, and some countries have sought to address these issues through policies, action plans and programmes at all levels. In order to prevent violence against women and girls, root causes are being addressed, together with the various risk factors contributing to its occurrence at many levels, including those of society, family, relationships and the individual. Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as eliminating poverty, are critical to efforts to prevent violence against women and girls.

11. To date, despite the fact that there have been some promising practices, the approaches to prevention have been fragmented and ad hoc. The interaction between the root causes of violence against women and girls and the various risk factors

contributing to its likelihood is complex. Therefore, effective prevention of violence against women and girls requires a comprehensive, coordinated and holistic strategy that includes the following: implementing legal and policy reforms; changing institutional culture and strengthening institutional capacity and multisectoral coordination to prevent and respond to violence; promoting, protecting and ensuring the enjoyment by all women and girls of their human rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; and engaging all segments of society to change the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that condone or perpetuate violence.

12. Involving men and boys in efforts to end violence against women and girls is essential. Work with men and boys has expanded and has been strengthened worldwide. Actions, such as awareness-raising and sensitization efforts targeted at men and boys, the fostering of models of non-violent manhood and new perspectives on masculinity and macho culture, educating men about gender equality and women's human rights, and mentoring young men and boys at critical stages of development, are increasingly being implemented. Other efforts have targeted men and boys who have perpetrated violence against women and girls, and have been focused on changes in behaviour.

13. While progress has been made in working with men and boys, efforts have usually been limited in terms of their impact and sustainability. In order to address this challenge, participants called for the expansion of interventions into systematic, large-scale and coordinated programmes. It is also important to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations that work with men and boys and to ensure that initiatives include a broad range of strategies that reach large numbers of men. Such work should be guided by the goal of achieving gender equality and advancing the human rights of women and girls.

14. Engaging with community, traditional and religious leaders are critical to preventing and responding to violence against women and girls. Efforts have increased to engage traditional and religious leaders to end practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage and to ensure access for women and girls to the formal justice system. Good practices include commitments made by religious leaders to working with Governments to eradicate harmful traditional practices, including by issuing religious decrees to that effect, as well as the development of formal government agencies, including ministerial departments, to work exclusively with traditional leaders in promoting positive cultural practices and eliminating those that discriminate against women.

15. Participants confirmed that efforts to prevent and raise awareness about violence against women and girls and to counteract attitudes that perpetuate such violence are important. These include national campaigns, some targeting the general public and others directed at particular groups of women and girls, young people, and men and boys; changes to educational curricula and teacher training; publications and websites that inform victims/survivors of their rights and available services; and television and theatrical performances in schools. Participants noted the importance of raising awareness about women's sexual and reproductive health rights in this respect. The media were cited as an important mechanism for raising public awareness, but participants were concerned that they could perpetuate negative stereotypes. High-level officials are increasingly making public statements condemning violence against women and calling for an end to it. However, attitudes

and practices conducive to violence against women continue to persist and to perpetuate a culture of silence. Leadership at all levels — local, national, regional and international — and in all sectors to end all forms of violence against women is critical for sustained action to end societal tolerance of, and complicity in, violence against women.

16. Many participants emphasized the increase in support and services for victims/survivors of violence against women and girls at the national level. This includes the establishment of shelters and safe houses, national hotlines, mobile health clinics and free legal services, as well as access to housing and employment. Integrated and coordinated responses made through one-stop centres located in hospitals and other stand-alone locations have proved to be effective. Improved responses by law enforcement officials have led to an increase in the reporting of violence by women victims/survivors. Many women, however, are still not able to make use of the services and responses necessary for addressing the physical, mental, emotional and socioeconomic impacts of violence. This is owing to a lack of availability, especially in rural and remote areas, as well as to a lack of accessibility, particularly for women and girls who suffer multiple forms of discrimination. Further efforts are needed in order to ensure that all victims/survivors have access to adequate and coordinated services and that those services and responses are sufficiently funded.

17. Compiling a strong evidence base is crucial to ending violence against women and girls. Comprehensive and accurate data, including improved qualitative and quantitative data and statistics, are necessary to enable us to understand the causes, consequences and prevalence of violence against women and girls, to develop and implement appropriate laws, policies and strategies, and to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness. National capacity to collect reliable data has been enhanced through the dedicated efforts of national mechanisms, in particular statistical offices, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies. Yet, inadequate data and statistics on violence against women remain a major gap. Multidisciplinary research, including the conduct of periodic national surveys, should continue to broaden and strengthen the evidence base with regard to violence against women and girls.

18. Some participants pointed out that the priority theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission is directly relevant to the post-2015 development agenda and called for ending violence against women and girls to be an integral part of that agenda.
