



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
16 March 2015

Original: English

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

Item 3 of the provisional agenda\*

**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”**

### **Round table: National mechanisms for gender equality – advocates for action and accountability, catalysts for change**

#### **Chair’s summary**

1. On 11 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women convened a round table discussion on the theme: “National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and accountability, catalysts for change”. The round table focused on the role of institutional mechanisms in implementing commitments on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Ministers of gender equality and representatives of the diverse range of gender equality mechanisms discussed ways in which such mechanisms have effectively promoted accountability and monitored progress towards gender equality, especially through alliance building and partnerships.

2. H.E. Mr. Ruben Zamora, Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (El Salvador), chaired the round table, and Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights served as moderator. The panelists were: Ms. Makhfirat Khidir-zoda, Chair of the Committee on Women and Family Affairs, Tajikistan; Ms. Maria de Lurdes Martins de Sousa Bessa, member of the Women’s Parliamentary Group, Timor-Leste; Ms. Rose Rwabuhiri, Chief Gender Monitor, Gender Monitoring Office, Rwanda; Ms. Nicole Ameline, Member, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Ms. Roxana Alvarado, First Vice President of the National Assembly, Ecuador; Ms. Absa Wade Ngom, Director, Department of Women, Equity and Equality, Ministry of Women, Family and Children, Senegal; Ms. Ana Arganashvili, Project Manager, Partnerships for Human Rights, Georgia; Dr. Salma Nims, Secretary General, Jordanian National Commission for Women; Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Royal Government of Cambodia; Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director UNFPA; and Ms. Alejandra Mora Mora, Minister for Women’s Affairs of Costa Rica and President of the Inter-American Commission of Women. The panelists gave examples of the catalytic role of national mechanisms for gender equality in three outcome areas critical to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for

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\* E/CN.6/2015/1.



Action: legislative change and accountability for gender equality; increased resources and enhanced service delivery for gender equality; and advocacy, awareness raising and women's participation and leadership. 24 government representatives contributed to the interactive dialogue.

3. The discussion confirmed that national mechanisms for gender equality are principal drivers for the realization of gender equality and remain central to the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action, in the context of the post 2015 development agenda. A diverse range of gender equality mechanisms has been created or strengthened in the past 20 years, responding to the specific national context, and include, in addition to a central unit within Government at the highest level, focal points and working groups across sectoral ministries; accountability institutions such as ombuds, 'gender monitoring offices' and observatories; and advisory councils. They also increasingly include mechanisms that are part of the legislative branch, such as women's parliamentary caucuses or committees that focus on gender equality issues. They also include networks and coalitions of non-governmental and women's organizations. National mechanisms also increasingly have well-established linkages to regional and global monitoring mechanisms.

### **Promoting legislative change and accountability for gender equality**

4. Participants welcomed the strong relationships forged between government machinery for gender equality and parliamentary bodies such as women's caucuses to ensure the passage of legislation across a wide range of issues, including maternal health, family law and violence against women. A useful strategy to secure passage of such legislation was for women parliamentarians to work across political parties. Review by a dedicated parliamentary mechanism of all legislation from a gender perspective to ensure absence of discrimination against women was also recommended. The establishment of an inter-ministerial coordination commission to monitor progress in the achievement of gender equality was another good practice example. In a post-conflict and reconstruction context, the preparation of a national action plan and implementation framework for Security Council resolution 1325 could contribute to greater accountability for gender equality.

5. Speakers agreed that government commitment together with action for gender equality was critical to enhance accountability for results. Tools for increasing accountability included: the creation of an independent national gender monitor to monitor respect for gender equality by public organs at all levels, the creation of a forum for national dialogue and consultation, and collaboration between local government, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Partnering by government mechanisms with civil society organizations to monitor the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy and of action for gender equality and women's empowerment was seen as especially effective in increasing State accountability. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was an important global accountability mechanism, particularly in its ability to work with national mechanisms for gender equality and providing recommendations for strengthening compliance with treaty obligations.

### **Increasing resources and improving the delivery of services**

6. Participants emphasized that universal education and free healthcare were fundamental prerequisite to achieving gender equality. They highlighted that successful delivery of gender-sensitive services greatly depended on the institutional framework, as well as the resources and political engagement committed to their delivery. Linking up gender-sensitive policy making with gender-sensitive budgeting was seen as one of the most effective ways for mainstreaming gender perspectives in the work of all public institutions and their delivery of services to women and girls. Examples of the use of quotas and benchmarks demonstrated how these tools could be used to bring about positive change towards achieving gender equality.

7. Participants highlighted the strategic use of statistics and data, and of gender-sensitive indicators to mobilize and improve resources allocated towards gender equality. Such data can be used strategically to demonstrate the benefits to society of gender equality and can effectively be used to influence decision-makers. In order to produce such data and to measure results, participants drew attention to the critical need for effective monitoring and evaluation. National mechanisms for gender equality had a leading role to play in promoting

monitoring and evaluation, and examples such as national gender observatories and civil society platforms acting as ‘watchdogs’ were provided.

8. Concern was expressed about the continuing challenges of under-funding of gender equality work and the low priority attached to it on government and public agendas. To counteract such trends, participants agreed on the value of collaboration and coalition-building between gender equality mechanisms within government at different levels, and civil society. Participants noted that engaging civil society ensures greater transparency and accountability, and also contributed to better service delivery to women and girls. The view was expressed that the responsibilities of national mechanisms for gender equality should be fully transferred to civil society and an example was provided of civil society coalitions collaborating with government ministries and the legislature.

9. Participants agreed that political will was necessary to secure increased, long-term funding for gender equality and, consequently, improved and consistent service delivery for gender equality. Enhanced service delivery, in turn, benefitted from a collaborative and holistic approach, engaging both government and civil society. National mechanisms had a key role to play in fostering such alliances and advocating for government commitment.

### **Advocacy, awareness raising, and improving women’s participation**

10. Participants gave examples of effective strategies to build capacities of national mechanisms to be the knowledge and advocacy hub for gender equality issues. National mechanisms had successfully facilitated partnerships and collaboration on gender equality issues across all levels of government. In this regard, participants agreed that a key determinant of the effectiveness and impact of the broad range of institutional mechanisms was their capacity to work together by building partnerships and engaging in collaborative processes. Such partnerships were seen as a fundamental component of strengthening collaboration between women’s/gender equality ministries and other parts of government to institutionalize gender mainstreaming and advance gender equality. Institutional frameworks to foster such collaboration and implement gender mainstreaming across all levels government – national, provincial and local — included: appointing gender focal points across various levels of government; establishing networks of women parliamentarians; and creating coalitions between civil society organizations and national commissions and councils for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

11. Many national machineries implemented capacity building, awareness raising and advocacy efforts aimed at addressing structural barriers and institutional obstacles to achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. Among the examples provided were: broadening expertise of stakeholders on gender equality issues through training, seminars, workshops and national forums; working with political decision-makers and through government to ensure that the head of the national machinery for gender equality is at ministerial or comparable high-level rank; building partnerships to monitor and effectively measure progress made in women’s participation; working with stakeholders to integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies and programmes.

12. Speakers acknowledged the important role of international organizations in supporting national mechanisms for gender equality, including through building capacity for monitoring and accountability, providing technical assistance and supporting advocacy campaigns to ensure the realization of gender equality commitments.

13. Participants discussed steps taken by national mechanisms towards ensuring women’s full and equal participation in decision-making bodies, and agreed that support for women’s political participation at the local and national levels was an increasing priority of national mechanisms. Temporary special measures, such as quotas, as well as constitutional and legal reforms to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in political institutions and decision-making bodies were presented. Training for women in politics had been effective in increasing the impact of their political participation and enhanced their representation in elections.

Despite progress, prevailing discriminatory social norms, the persistence of violence against women running for political office and the overall lack of political will were acknowledged as remaining critical barriers to advancing women's participation and leadership across all levels of decision-making.