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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**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”**

### Realizing the rights of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls

#### Chair’s summary

1. On 18 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive panel on: “Realizing the rights of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls”. Ms. Pille Kesler (Estonia), Vice-Chair of the Commission chaired the panel, and Ms. Alda Facio, a member of the Working Group on Discrimination against women in law and in practice, served as Moderator. The panellists were: Ms. Kim Eun Mee (Republic of Korea), Korea International Cooperation Agency; Ms. Anasztazia Nagy (Hungary), Roma Education Fund; Ms. Teresia Otieno (Kenya), International Steering Committee of the International Community of Women Living with HIV; and Ms. Petrona Laura Reyes Quino (Guatemala), a member of the Mayan Organization of Women Living with Disabilities of Guatemala. Representatives of 24 Member States and 3 non-governmental organizations participated in the inter-active discussion.
2. Participants reaffirmed the right of marginalized and vulnerable populations to all human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in international treaties and national laws. They recognized that marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls are a heterogeneous group whose wide ranging needs must be taken into account in development, and their diverse backgrounds and characteristics regarded as assets. Such groups include women with disabilities, indigenous, minority and migrant women, lesbian, bisexual,

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transgender and intersex persons, migrants, asylum seekers, internally displaced women, women living with HIV, young women, single women, older women, widows, and rural women. Considerations of intersectionality – the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination and inequality that marginalized, vulnerable and minority women and girls face because of their gender in addition to their membership in a vulnerable or excluded group – must be taken into account in the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies and programmatic interventions and strategies to enable all women and girls to enjoy their human rights. Education was a key tool for overcoming marginalization, on all grounds. National budgets needed to take into account a gender perspective through, for example, gender-responsive budgeting and also include a focus on marginalized and disadvantaged women.

3. Participants discussed efforts at the national level to promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities. The national constitutions of a number of states recognize the rights of persons with disabilities. Laws have been adopted and national action plans elaborated that aim to promote the rights of persons living with disabilities. Task forces and committees have been created to provide institutional frameworks for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. Participants also gave examples of measures that had been introduced to provide social protection for persons with disabilities through cash and in-kind measures such as the provision of spectacles, mobility aids and hearing devices. Measures specifically targeting women and girls with disabilities included the establishment of training centres, scholarships and microfinance programmes. Efforts had also been made to improve accessibility to transportation, buildings and other facilities for persons with disabilities as well as in infrastructural development, and in rebuilding areas affected by conflict and natural disaster. The needs of caregivers for persons with disabilities also received attention.
4. Participants expressed concern that the risk of experiencing violence was particularly high for women and girls with disabilities in both developing and developed countries. For this reason, public education and awareness raising in combatting violence against women, and violence against women and girls with disabilities in particular, required high priority.
5. The condition of marginalization and vulnerability including the intersection of vulnerabilities for indigenous women and girls in rural and remote areas was discussed. Particular concern was raised about the impact of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation on these groups of women and girls considering their role in agricultural food production and energy management. Women's economic empowerment was a common priority of many Member States, recognizing that poverty contributes to marginalization and vulnerability among women in rural areas. Participants reported on a number of efforts that specifically target women and girls in rural areas, especially through promotion of sustainable livelihood opportunities. Programmes to support productivity and access to markets, access to microcredit and insurance, and enhancing women's value addition in the production chain were among the examples that had expanded such opportunities for women.

6. Improving access to health care in rural areas was another area of action that contributed to the realization of the rights of marginalized women and girls, for example, through mobile health care facilities. Another priority area was improving education for girls in rural areas. Policies to strengthen exercise of land rights for women and girls also contributed to realization of rights. Infrastructural development such as rural electrification, the expansion of roads, as well as improvements in housing were identified as particularly beneficial to women and girls in rural and remote areas. Supporting women's organizations and self-help groups as well as the political participation of women in local governance structures were further strategies that had contributed to overcoming the marginalization of rural women and girls.
7. Speakers highlighted the continuing urgency of addressing gender inequalities and challenging power relationships that fuel HIV, including through engaging young women and girls living with HIV particularly in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Participants observed that women living with HIV continue to experience a range of obstacles to achieving their highest attainable standard of health, and concern was expressed about violations of their sexual and reproductive rights, through practices such as forced sterilization. Women living with HIV also experienced relatively higher rates of maternal mortality and a high incidence of institutional and intimate partner violence. In response, support programmes for women living with HIV had been put in place, including access to nutrition programmes, antenatal and postnatal care, income-generation activities, conditional cash transfers, as means of enhancing the livelihoods of women living with HIV. At the same time, participants called for upscaling and replication of these promising programmes and good practices.
8. Participants emphasized the need to realize the sexual and reproductive health and rights of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls throughout their life-cycle. The right of women to control their own bodies and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, was noted, devoid of coercion, discrimination and violence. Upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights was essential for HIV prevention and the protection of women migrants. Participants therefore called for the implementation of quality and comprehensive sexuality education at all levels of education for girls and boys to equip them with scientific knowledge about their sexuality and health and to enable them make informed decisions.
9. Ethnic minority women encountered a specific set of challenges in the realization of their rights, as was elaborated with the example of Roma ethnic minority women and girls. Roma women and girls suffer multiple and intersectional discrimination due to cultural practices such as early marriage, early school dropout rates, youth caring for younger siblings, violence, and seclusion from city centres. It was recommended that governments design specific actions and strategies for ethnic minority women such as Roma women and girls, taking into particular account the intersectional discrimination faced by these groups. In order to overcome marginalization and discrimination, speakers called for, and gave examples of second chance programmes to allow girls who marry early to re-enter the education system and to guarantee educational outcomes. Other steps should include efforts to

provide paid decent work and opportunities to participate in planning and decision-making processes in policy and legislation. Awareness campaigns to bring attention to the multiple and intersecting discrimination that Roma women and girls face were highlighted.

10. As participants welcomed progress in policy and legislative reforms, they also voiced concern about the significant gaps in implementation of those that address the needs of marginalized and vulnerable women and girls. Speakers called for cross-sectoral policy initiatives as well as partnership between government, international institutions and civil society for the benefit of marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls. Governments and international organizations should allocate resources that specifically target women and girls who face multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination. The importance of data collection, disaggregated by a number of factors, to facilitate the understanding of the complexities of intersecting forms of discrimination and to help in framing national responses to reflect the needs of the marginalized women and girls was underlined.
11. A key part in all strategies for transformative change was the activism, engagement and participation of the women who experience vulnerability and marginalization, and of their organizations. Such transformative change required both top down and bottom up approaches, including attitudinal and social change, identification and recognition of female role models, creating adequate spaces for marginalized and vulnerable women and girls to participate in decision-making at all levels, strengthening the social protection floor and access to social services and productive resources, data collection, as well as policy development and constitutional and legislative reforms.