



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN CONCLUDES FIFTIETH SESSION;

ADOPTS AGREED CONCLUSIONS ON DECISION-MAKING, DEVELOPMENT

Also Recommends Priority Themes for 2007-2009;

Chair Praises Session's Spirit of Dialogue, Consensus, Flexibility

The Commission on the Status of Women this afternoon concluded its fiftieth session by adopting its agreed conclusions, and recommending its priority themes for the period 2007-2009, for adoption by the Economic and Social Council.

For 2007, the priority theme would be: "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child"; for 2008, "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women"; and for 2009, "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS". The themes are based on the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Unanimously approving a draft resolution on its future organization and methods of work, as orally revised, the Commission also recommended to the Economic and Social Council that annual panel discussions would take place on the means of accelerating implementation of previous commitments, with regard to the priority theme. The Commission would also continue to discuss emerging issues, trends and new approaches to gender equality issues.

Among other issues, the text addresses the forthcoming discussion, during the fifty-third session, of the possibility of conducting, in 2010, a review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Also adopted without a vote, were the two texts containing agreed conclusions of the Commission on promoting equal participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels, and enhancing participation of women in development.

By the first of those texts, as orally revised, the Commission, while recognizing that some progress in women's participation in decision-making at all levels has been achieved, expressed concern at the serious and persistent obstacles, "which are many and varied in nature", that still hinder the advancement of women and their participation in decision-making, including feminization of poverty, lack of equal access to health, education, training and employment, armed conflict and lack of security.

In the second text, as orally revised, the Commission elaborated on the measures needed to create an enabling environment "for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work", through such actions as promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, mainstreaming of a gender perspective, promotion of full participation and empowerment of women, and enhanced international cooperation.

In closing remarks, the Commission's Chairperson Carmen María Gallardo (El Salvador) said that, during two weeks of intensive work, delegations had shown a strong political will to advance the status of women, and a spirit of dialogue, consensus and flexibility. The session had concluded at a historic time, as yesterday, the creation of the Human Rights Council had been approved. The Commission hoped to inform that Council, as it had done to the Human Rights Commission.

She highlighted the high-level panel on the gender perspective in international migration and the International Women's Day, and paid tribute to all women who, throughout the Commission's 50-year existence, had made inspired contributions to its work.

The representatives of the United States, New Zealand (also on behalf of Canada and Norway), Egypt, Syria, the Sudan, Japan and Venezuela spoke in explanation of position on the agreed conclusions.

In further action, the Commission appointed Jiakun Guo (China), Jennifer Feller (Mexico) and Janne Jokinen (Finland) to the Working Group on Communications of the Commission at the fifty-first session. It also adopted its report on the fiftieth session, introduced by its Rapporteur Dicky Komar (Indonesia), as well as the provisional agenda, as orally revised, for its fifty-first session.

Background

The Commission on the Status of Women was expected to conclude its fiftieth session this afternoon by approving one draft resolution, to be adopted by the Economic and Social Council, and adopting two draft agreed conclusions.

By a draft resolution on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (document E/CN.6/2006/L.8), the Economic and Social Council would decide that, from its fifty-first session, the Commission would consider one priority theme at each session, based on the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

For 2007, the priority theme would be “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child”; for 2008, “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women”, and for 2009, “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”.

The Council would further decide that, each year, the Commission would discuss ways and means to accelerate implementation of the previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme, through two interactive expert panels. The Commission would also continue to discuss emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women, or equality between women and men.

In view of the traditional importance of non-governmental organizations in the advancement of women, the Council would decide that such organizations should be encouraged to participate in the work of the Commission. The regional commissions would be invited to continue to contribute to the work of the Commission.

By further provisions, the Council would also decide that the Commission, at its fifty-third session, would discuss the possibility of conducting, in 2010, a review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2010.

Contained in two drafts are the Commission’s agreed conclusions submitted by the Chairperson at the conclusion of the session.

Contained in document E/CN.6/2006/L.9 are the Commission’s comments on equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels, where it reaffirms the emphasis on women’s role and active participation in such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the outcome of international conferences and meetings, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the document adopted at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on women.

While recognizing that some progress in women's participation in decision-making at all levels has been achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission expresses concern at the serious and persistent obstacles, "which are many and varied in nature", that still hinder the advancement of women and their participation in decision-making, including the feminization of poverty; a lack of equal access to health, education, training and employment; armed conflict; and lack of security.

The text underlines the importance of women's empowerment and effective participation, as critical tools to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence, and recognizes that elimination of such violence enables women to participate equally in decision-making. The Commission further expresses concern about the lack of sufficient information and sex-disaggregated data, at all levels.

According to the draft, the Commission reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in peacebuilding. Gender equality, development and peace are key issues for the promotion of women, and new efforts are needed, by all actors, to create an enabling environment in decision-making. Among other things, the Commission also reaffirms the urgent goal of achieving 50/50 gender distribution in the United Nations system, especially at senior and policymaking levels, with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

Among numerous actions that the Commission recommends for Governments, international, regional and civil society organizations, and all other players, are measures to ensure women's right to vote, to review existing legislation, to establish concrete goals, targets and benchmarks, and to take innovative steps to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers. Also suggested in the text are alternative approaches and changes in institutional structures and practices; greater involvement of marginalized women and measures to counter the barriers that they face; incorporation of gender perspectives in development policies and programmes; promotion of international cooperation; creation of education and employment opportunities; access to microcredit; elimination of gender gaps in health and wages; and networking and mentoring among women leaders and girls.

The draft also addresses such issues as exchange of best practices, involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality, elimination of gender stereotypes, fair and balanced coverage of male and female candidates, introduction of quotas, promotion of women through training programmes and recruitment drives, and research, monitoring and evaluation of women's participation in decision-making, at all levels.

Contained in document E/CN.6/2006/L.10 are the Commission's agreed conclusions on women's enhanced participation in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work.

Emphasizing the need to ensure women's full integration and participation as both agents and beneficiaries in the development process, the Commission elaborates on the measures to create an enabling environment for the advancement of women, through such actions as promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, mainstreaming of gender perspectives, promotion of full participation and empowerment of women, and enhanced international cooperation. In that connection, the Commission reaffirms that full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is an essential contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.

According to the text, investment in the development of women and girls has a multiplier effect, in particular on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth, in all sectors of the economy, especially in key areas, such as agriculture, industry and services. Among the main challenges to the creation of an enabling environment, the Commission lists insufficient coherence and coordination between development and gender equality policies and strategies; insufficient time-bound targets; multiple forms of discriminatory practices; persistent stereotypes; unequal access to benefits, opportunities and training; insufficient national mechanisms; armed conflicts; and insufficient political will and resources.

Stressing that, to address such challenges, a systematic, comprehensive and multisectoral approach is needed, the Commission urges Governments and all other players to incorporate gender perspectives into all the processes and mechanisms relating to national development strategies, fully utilizing existing gender equality policies and strategies.

Among other numerous actions, it also advocates elaboration and implementation of comprehensive gender-sensitive poverty-eradication strategies; development of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; close cooperation between central authorities and local governments; introduction of targeted measures to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls; promotion of equal property and land rights; elimination of discrimination and sexual exploitation of female refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons; mobilization of adequate funding for gender-sensitive development policies and programmes; and efforts to enhance trade opportunities for developing countries, in order to improve the economic situation of women.

Underlining that each country has the primary responsibility for its own sustainable development and poverty eradication, the Commission urges Governments to ensure that women, especially poor women in developing countries, benefit from the pursuit of effective, equitable, development-oriented and durable solutions to the external debt and debt-servicing problems of developing countries, including the option of official development assistance and debt cancellation, and calls for continued international cooperation in that regard.

The text also addresses the need for the international community, the United Nations system, relevant regional and international organizations, and the private sector and civil society to provide assistance to Governments, at their request, in building institutional capacity, and provide the necessary financial resources to assist them in their efforts. Multilateral donors, international financial institutions and regional banks are urged to

support national efforts to ensure that a higher proportion of resources reach women, in particular in rural and remote areas.

Action on the Drafts

As the Commission took up its draft agreed conclusions on women's enhanced participation in development (E/CN.6/2006/L.10), a representative of the Secretariat introduced a correction to the text, saying that it had been submitted on behalf of the Chair.

The draft was then approved without a vote.

Speaking in explanation of position after the action on the set of agreed conclusions on enhanced participation of women in development, the representative of the United States said that she was pleased to join the consensus and reiterated her country's commitment to the empowerment of women and their enjoyment of all human rights. Her Government had devoted substantial resources to programmes and activities to eliminate violence against women, increase access to health care, education and economic opportunities, empower women in conflict situations, provide protection and assistance to refugee women and internally displaced persons, increase women's political participation, and ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice.

The agreed conclusions reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, and expressed important political goals that her delegation endorsed. She reaffirmed those goals, based on several understandings. She understood that those documents constituted an important policy framework that did not create international legal rights or legally binding obligations of States under international law. During the 2005 meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, there had been international consensus that the Beijing documents created no new international rights, including a right to abortion, and the Commission's Chairperson had confirmed that understanding. Reaffirmation of the Beijing goals and commitments did not constitute a change in the position of the United States, with respect to treaties it had not ratified.

The United States fully supported the principle of voluntary choice regarding maternal and child health and family planning, she continued. It had stated clearly, on many occasions, consistent with the International Conference on Population and Development, that it did not recognize abortion as a method of family planning, nor supported abortion in its reproductive health assistance. There was no international consensus that the terms "reproductive health services" and "reproductive rights" did not include abortion, nor constituted support, endorsement, or promotion of abortion or the use of abortifacients. The United States understood that reference to the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing outcome, as well as the use of the phrase "reproductive health", did not create any rights, and could not be interpreted to constitute support, endorsement, or promotion of abortion. Supporting the treatment of women who suffered injuries or illnesses caused by legal or illegal abortion, including post-abortion care, the United States did not place such treatment among abortion-related services.

She emphasized the value of comprehensive prevention strategies to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. That approach employed population-specific interventions, which highlighted abstinence for youth and unmarried persons, including delay of sexual debut, mutual faithfulness and partner reduction for sexually active adults, as well as correct and consistent use of condoms by those whose behaviour placed them at risk for transmitting or getting infected with HIV. She supported interventions that were informed by, and responsive to, local needs, epidemiology and distinctive social and cultural patterns, as well as coordinated with HIV/AIDS strategies of host Governments.

It was also essential to recognize the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for adolescents to provide appropriate direction and guidance on sexual and reproductive matters, education and other aspects of children's lives, she said.

Turning to another topic, she added that paragraph 12 (d) encouraged Governments and other bodies "to initiate positive steps to promote equal pay for equal work or work of equal value". The United States accepted equal pay for equal work, but had concerns about work of equal value. There were no internationally agreed criteria to decide whether a particular form of work was of equal value to another.

The representative of New Zealand, also speaking on behalf of Canada and Norway, joined the consensus on the text, but was disappointed that there had not been an opportunity to develop a text that fully addressed the issues of health, education and work, and the connections between them, for women in development, because of time and other constraints. Protecting and promoting women's right to education, work and health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, was essential to the empowerment and advancement of women and girls. The conclusions should reflect the important relationship between education and health, in particular in responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and promoting sexual and reproductive health. She hoped that the new working methods would provide such a framework. The issues treated by the conclusions were too important to treat partially.

The representative of Japan said it would have done better to address the issues based on the stronger text originally prepared by the facilitator. She hoped that the Commission would better manage its workload in the future.

As the Commission then turned to the draft on equal participation of men and women in decision-making at all levels (E/CN.6/2006/L.9), a representative of the Secretariat introduced a correction to the English version of the text.

Prior to action on the text, the representative of Venezuela also introduced a correction to the Spanish version of the draft, saying that it contained a reference to the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, but her delegation did not recognize that

document as valid. The same mistake was contained in both English and Spanish versions of draft resolution E/CN.6/2006/L.10. When the texts were negotiated in informal consultations, it had been agreed not to include reference to that document.

A member of the Bureau confirmed that the reference to the document had been dropped during consultations. A representative of the Secretariat said that all language versions of the agreed conclusions would be concordant and amended accordingly.

The draft was then adopted without a vote, as orally amended.

Speaking in explanation of position after the adoption of both texts, the representative of Egypt said that his delegation would have preferred to see reference to the situation of women under occupation in both texts. However, it was his understanding that foreign occupation was covered by reference to armed conflicts in both texts, and armed conflict and lack of security in one of them.

Syria's representative said that the Commission had adopted agreed conclusions to strengthen the participation of women in development and decision-making at all levels, and stressed the important role of the United Nations in implementing strategic objectives and measures in the areas relating to women. More initiatives were needed, particularly in the light of the negative developments that seriously undermined the Charter and international legitimacy. The threats included foreign intervention. Her delegation had been flexible in the negotiations. There was only one delegation that had refused to accept mention of the situation of women under foreign occupation, and she profoundly regretted that the agreed conclusions did not contain any paragraphs on eliminating all obstacles to the effective participation in development and decisions for women under occupation.

The representative of United States said that her former statement also applied to the current text.

The representative of the Sudan said his delegation had participated in the negotiations on the conclusions in a spirit of cooperation, openness and dialogue, because it wished to strengthen the role of women in all areas. Although agreement had been reached, there were still obstacles to the participation of women in development and decision-making, one of which was foreign occupation, as it limited women's participation in the fields of development and decision-making at all levels. Although agreement on highlighting the issue had nearly been reached, one single delegation refused to join that consensus.

Future Methods of Work

The Commission's Vice-chairman TOM WOODROFFE (United Kingdom) introduced the draft resolution on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission, contained in document E/CN.6./2006/L.8.

The Commission then approved the text, as orally revised, by consensus.

The Commission then turned to its provisional agenda for the next session, and its Secretary added several documents to the list contained in that draft (E/CN.6/2006/L.7).

The Commission then approved the draft without a vote, as orally revised.

Turning to the appointment of members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for the fifty-first session, the Commission then appointed Jiakun Guo from China, Jennifer Feller from Mexico and Janne Jokinen from Finland, as members of that Group. The appointment of the remaining members of the Group was deferred to the next session of the Commission, with the understanding that, upon the nomination by their respective regional groups, the nominees would be permitted to participate fully in the proceedings of the Working Group, which is to convene prior to the start of the fifty-first session.

Adoption of Report

Vice-Chairman-cum-Rapporteur DICKY KOMAR (Indonesia) introduced the Commission's report on its fiftieth session, contained in document E/CN.6/2006/L.6.

The Commission then adopted the draft report and entrusted the Rapporteur with its finalization.

Closing Remarks

In closing remarks, the Commission's Chairperson, CARMEN MRIA GALLARDO (El Salvador) said that, during two weeks of intensive work, delegations had shown a strong political will to advance the status of women, and a spirit of dialogue, consensus and flexibility. The session had concluded at a historic time, as yesterday, the creation of the Human Rights Council had been approved. The Commission hoped to inform that Council, as it had done to the Human Rights Commission. She thanked the members of the Bureau, the Secretariat, in particular the Division for the Advancement of Women, and non-governmental organizations, and expressed the hoped that the gender perspective could

remain a pressing issue in the United Nations. She also thanked all the women who, through their inspiring work, had contributed to the work of the Commission over the past 50 years.

She said the Commission's work over the past two weeks had led to the adoption of important decisions, including the two agreed conclusions. The resolution on the future methods of work would strengthen the work of the Commission and would provide a clear view of the items to be considered over the next three years.

This year's high-level panel on the gender perspective in international migration had been of particular importance. The Chair's summary of the substantive debate would be submitted to the General Assembly at the occasion of the high-level dialogue on international migration and development, in September 2006. She highlighted the active participation of women at this year's International Women's Day. On that day, the Secretary-General had underlined the importance of redoubling efforts towards gender equality.