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Commission on the Status of Women**Forty-seventh session**

3-14 March 2003

Agenda item 3 (c) (ii)

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on women and to the 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 the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives”**Panel discussion on women’s human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly****Summary submitted by the Moderator**

1. At its 3rd meeting, on 3 March 2003, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion followed by a dialogue on women’s human rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session, one of the themes of the forty-seventh session of the Commission. The panellists were Zhang Lixi (China), Vice President of China’s Women’s University; Vera Duarte Lobo de Pina (Cape Verde), Coordinator of the National Committee of Human Rights; Barbara Limanowska (Poland), Special Adviser on Trafficking for various international organizations; and Ayse Feride Acar (Turkey), Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
2. The participants agreed that all forms of violence against women were a clear violation of women’s human rights. Every day women and girls died as a result of various forms of sex-based violence.
3. Participants focused on domestic violence as one of the most widespread forms of violence against women. Domestic violence should not be regarded as an event between a man and a woman but should be dealt within the context of overall relations between women and men. Violence against women was a manifestation of

unequal distribution of power between men and women within families and communities. Within families, women might be subordinate to men and be considered the property of their husbands and families. It was important to sensitize government officials, law enforcement officials, medical workers, social workers and society at large to domestic violence, its causes and ways and means to prevent it.

4. Participants stressed that, in addition to physical and sexual abuse, hidden forms of violence, such as psychological abuse, also needed to be addressed. Psychological abuse had a long-lasting, negative impact on victims' lives, damaging victims' self-esteem and confidence, destroying their dignity and respect as human beings, isolating them from the outside world and entrapping them in violent relationships.

5. Improvements in the response of social services in intervening in and preventing domestic violence against women had been observed in many parts of the world. However, a lot more needed to be done, and social services agencies had to be strengthened. Participants also stressed the need to provide for treatment programmes for male perpetrators and conduct community-based public education and "zero tolerance" campaigns. Efforts had to be undertaken, especially through the media, to change public attitudes towards domestic violence and disseminate information to the public on women's rights and the remedies available for violations of those rights. Involving men and boys in programmes to eliminate violence against women was considered essential.

6. Participants highlighted another form of violence that in the past ten years had reached worldwide proportions, namely trafficking in women and girls. Trafficking was acknowledged as a serious problem for countries of origin, transit and destination. Although initiatives had been taken to combat it, there was no evidence of a decrease in the phenomenon.

7. It was noted that the traditional law enforcement approach, based on bar raids by the police, was ineffective and counter-productive as it pushed trafficking deeper underground, making it impossible to gain access to trafficked women and girls, who were viewed as criminals rather than victims. The need to take a human rights approach to trafficking was underscored, especially in respect of strategies to identify and assist victims. Clear instructions for the police on how to treat actual and potential victims of trafficking were required, and cooperation between police and specialized non-governmental organizations in the victim identification process was considered essential.

8. The reintegration of victims of trafficking was discussed. Participants called for the provision of psychological support for victims suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as sustained economic and social support including vocational training, the provision of jobs, microcredit and housing. Reintegration assistance had to be available to all returning victims of trafficking.

9. Participants recognized that non-governmental organizations had done a lot of work to combat trafficking but lacked capacity and resources, both of which should be strengthened. However, systems of long-term assistance to victims and integration programmes were possible only if Governments played the leading role in anti-trafficking activities — including through development and coordination of

national plans of action to combat trafficking — that should involve governmental and non-governmental actors, at both national and international levels.

10. Participants stressed the need to address the root causes of trafficking, including the economic situation of countries of origin, especially countries with economies in transition where changes in the economic structure had had a predominantly negative impact on women. Effective prosecution measures were necessary, and ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, should be encouraged.

11. Participants also underlined that women and girls were particularly vulnerable to all forms of violence and other human rights violations during armed conflict, and that special attention had to be given to their situation.

12. During the discussion, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was given particular attention. It was noted that some progress had been made in its implementation at the national level, particularly in the areas of new legislation, growing awareness and sensitivity, and the strengthening of national machineries for the advancement of women. However, participants stressed that States were far from having reached a shared notion of women's human rights as contained in the Convention, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Participants indicated that many States continued to have laws discriminating against women, including those governing marriage, administration of marital property, divorce, inheritance, and the family. Moreover, it was recalled that many States continued to have reservations with regard to the Convention which undermined the object and purpose of the Convention.

13. Participants referred to what they saw as an emerging negative trend in the implementation of women's human rights in the present globalized world, namely that in a number of societies, so-called respect for traditions, culture or religion of minorities appeared to impede the vigorous protection of women's human rights. It was stressed that discriminatory traditions that violated women's human rights had to be changed. In that regard, participants underscored the universality of women's human rights.

14. Participants also stated that there was growing recognition in the international arena that discrimination was multifaceted and complex. Much needed to be done to recognize and eliminate the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women around the world.

15. The role of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in ensuring a more effective implementation of the Convention was also pointed out. The Optional Protocol, which entered into force in 2000 allowed individual women and groups of women to complain to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of violations of their rights under the Convention. National-level awareness raising and capacity-building were considered critical for this instrument to be utilized effectively.

16. Participants also referred to the work under way towards the adoption of a regional human rights instrument, the protocol to the African Charter on Human and

People's Rights, which would help promote and protect women's human rights in Africa. The protocol should complement current international human rights instruments and would be particularly instrumental in combating social practices and legislation that discriminated against women, including in the area of violence against women.

17. Participants provided some examples of good practices and shared ideas on necessary measures to combat violence against women. Good practices included the provision of social security benefits to battered women and the development of indicators to gather reliable information on the occurrence of gender-based violence, with a view to formulating appropriate policies to combat violence against women. Efforts were necessary to pass and enforce legislation on all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as to ensure that women and girls were aware of their rights and the remedies available for the violation of such rights. Changing gender-role stereotypes through education and awareness-raising programmes and addressing the root causes of violence, including through poverty-reduction measures, were also considered fundamental.
