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

3-14 March 2003

Agenda item 3 (c)

**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****High-level round table of the Commission on the Status of Women on national experience in institutional capacity-building****Summary submitted by the Chairperson (Othman Jerandi)**

1. At its fourth meeting, on 4 March 2003, the Commission held a high-level round table (see Commission decision 46/101) on the theme of national experience in institutional capacity-building, in particular in relation to the two themes examined by the Commission at its forty-seventh session, “Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women” and “Women’s human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly”. The high-level round table was an opportunity for a dialogue primarily among senior representatives of national machineries for the advancement of women attending the forty-seventh session of the Commission from capitals. A discussion guide prepared by the Bureau of the Commission (E/CN.6/2003/CRP.3) supported the dialogue. One deputy prime minister, four ministers, nine vice-ministers, state secretaries and director-generals/secretary-generals, and 13 other senior representatives of national machineries for the advancement of women participated in the interactive dialogue.

2. Participants welcomed the convening of the high-level round table and saw it as a very good initiative to exchange views and national experience in institutional capacity-building for the advancement of women.

3. Participants discussed the organizational and structural evolution of national machineries, which in many instances had accelerated after the Fourth World Conference on Women. The examples revealed a great diversity of such machineries. Participants noted that structures and mandates responded to the particular circumstances of countries but also influenced the effectiveness of the mechanisms. Speakers noted that the preparatory process, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the Beijing Platform for Action had noticeably strengthened the role of national machineries. Since then, a number of governmental mechanisms with responsibility for promotion of gender equality and advancement of women had been upgraded or been moved to more strategic locations. Others had been strengthened through legislation or decrees. The mandates of a number of mechanisms had been further enhanced and clarified. The consideration of reports by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had also had positive effects on the status of national machineries.

4. Institutional arrangements for the advancement of women included full-fledged ministries for gender equality or ministries that included gender equality among their other responsibilities. Other countries had state secretariats or bureaux attached to presidential or prime ministerial offices, or had established departments for gender equality. Responsibility for gender equality was sometimes assigned to different ministers on a rotating basis, with the support of expert departments, or was shared between ministries and departments. In many countries, national machineries had decentralized structures, with offices or branches at the regional, provincial and/or district levels to ensure attention to gender equality issues at all levels of government and to link with women's groups at the grass-roots level, especially in rural areas. In many countries, governmental mechanisms were supplemented by advisory councils, ombudspersons, and other advocacy and monitoring institutions to enhance the promotion of gender equality.

5. Increasingly, the role of national machineries was to support the implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Participants underlined that because of the cross-cutting nature of gender issues, all ministries had responsibility for gender equality and were required to use the gender mainstreaming strategy to promote gender equality. Consequently, national machineries worked in coordination with all or a selected number of ministries and government agencies, and were responsible for evaluation, monitoring and follow-up. It was, however, also noted that even when a satisfactory structure was in place, a machinery's functionality could be limited by a lack of or insufficient power to influence or pressure ministries to address gender dimensions in their work. Participants suggested that the mandates of national machineries should be regularly reviewed and adjusted in order to respond to new challenges and global developments.

6. The use of the gender mainstreaming strategy was leading to adjustments in the role and functions of national machineries. Such machineries increasingly acted as "watchdogs" for gender equality and were called upon to ensure that assessments were made of the impact of all decisions and public policies on women and men before their adoption, rather than being implementing entities for specific activities for women. Others emphasized the continuing need for national machineries to advocate for the interests and needs of women, and to demand the implementation of activities and policies targeted to women. Many national machineries continued to execute such specific activities for the advancement of women, including awareness-raising, capacity-building and training.

7. Participants stressed that the coordination and monitoring role of the national machinery was greatly facilitated and enhanced when clear directives on gender equality had been issued from the highest level of government, i.e., the president or prime minister, to all government entities. Line ministries and government agencies in a number of countries had adopted gender equality policies and strategies, and had instituted gender offices or appointed gender focal points to enhance the implementation of such policies. In a number of countries, steering committees or inter-ministerial working groups had been established to support government-wide use of the gender mainstreaming strategy and to identify and address challenges and obstacles. Regular reporting requirements by ministries at national levels had also been established to enhance accountability.

8. Although many challenges remained in ensuring awareness about the requirements of gender mainstreaming, it was proving even more difficult to create the necessary capacity for undertaking gender analysis systematically in all governmental work. Participants emphasized that political will and relevant gender mainstreaming policies had to be complemented by technical capacity and expertise to undertake gender analysis in all sectoral areas. To that end, tools, methodologies and indicators had been prepared, and handbooks on gender mainstreaming for different ministries had been prepared to strengthen gender analysis and to have benchmarks for assessing progress. Competence development and training were important aspects to enhance capacity in the public sector, and in one country all ministers, including the prime minister, had undergone relevant training. Various incentive systems had also been put in place to increase attention to gender perspectives in government agencies. Other participants noted that lack of adequate analytical and diagnostic capacity continued to hamper progress in gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

9. Several participants discussed experience with gender-sensitive budgeting as a way of ensuring that public resources benefited women and men equally, and that women's interests and needs received appropriate attention. Participants were concerned about the very limited financial and human resources available to some national machineries, not only for specific activities for women but also for their coordination and catalytic functions. In many cases, the percentage of the national budget assigned to the national machinery was disproportionately low, or in the cases of ministries with joint portfolios such as women and children's affairs resource allocation within the ministry was uneven. National machineries were also working with international and regional organizations to increase capacity and expand activities in support of gender mainstreaming.

10. Promotion of gender equality required cooperation and collaboration with different stakeholders, especially as achievement of gender equality was a societal responsibility. Cooperation and collaboration with political parties, parliament and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, facilitated enactment and implementation of gender equality legislation. National machineries frequently worked with women's groups to implement projects and specific activities, and to reach women in remote and rural areas. Cooperation with the private sector was also increasingly undertaken to achieve stated goals. Cooperation with relevant stakeholders was especially important to ensure the implementation of national action plans for gender equality.

11. Information and communication technologies (ICT) could assist in such collaboration and promote good governance and democracy since they opened up and facilitated communication between the government decision makers and legislators, on the one hand, and civil society on the other. The media had an important role in raising awareness about gender issues, to combat stereotypes and strengthen commitment to gender equality.

12. Participants gave examples of practical activities undertaken to achieve gender equality, especially in the areas of violence against women, and the use of ICT. Women police stations and crises centres had been established to assist women victims of violence. Resources were being invested to train judges and enhance women's access to justice. Gender-sensitive legislation on immigration and refugee protection had been drafted, using tools of gender analysis, as well as other legislation aimed at fighting violence against women, including harmful traditional practices. Training activities on violence against women had helped to bring the issue into the public realm and to implement measures to combat such violence, and the practice of honour killings had been publicly condemned. The appointment of independent rapporteurs at the national level on such issues as trafficking in women and girls was presented as an example of good practice. One-stop crisis centres had been established in hospitals for victims of violence against women. Resources had been provided towards the prevention and elimination of trafficking in women and girls.

13. Other examples of activities focused on eliminating hunger and the reduction of women's poverty, and on supporting women in rural and remote areas, including through the provision of microfinance. The World Solidarity Fund to eradicate poverty and promote social and human development in the developing countries was mentioned as a possible channel for supporting ICT-related activities for women. Resources had been provided and public-private partnerships had been established to increase women's access to ICT. Measures had been taken to reduce women's illiteracy. Several participants mentioned that the number of women in political office had increased, which had facilitated the gender mainstreaming efforts. Training was provided to first-time women office-holders.

14. The high-level round table greatly benefited from the participation of high-level representatives from capitals, and from the interactive dialogue that took place among ministers and other senior officials with responsibility for promotion of gender equality at the national level. The exchange of experience and information was seen as a very valuable innovation of the forty-seventh session of the Commission, and participants were invited to continue this exchange of good practices, lessons learned and obstacles encountered in institutional capacity-building among national machineries in the months ahead. The Chairperson expressed his hope that the Commission would build on that first effort and enhance the interactive character of the dialogue at future sessions so as to improve the Commission's working methods and enhance its role as a central intergovernmental body for the follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.