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Commission on the Status of Women

Forty-eighth session

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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 action and initiatives: women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Panel discussion on women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Summary submitted by the moderator

1. At its 4th meeting, on 2 March 2004, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion followed by a dialogue on women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building, one of the thematic issues of the Commission’s forty-eighth session. The panellists were: Ariane Brunet (Canada), Coordinator of the Women’s Rights Programme, Rights and Democracy; Lois Lewis Bruthus (Liberia), Director-General of the Organization for Children and Adolescent Mothers; Amal Adib Sabbagh (Jordan), Secretary-General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women; Nancy Rocio Tapias Torredo (Colombia), Consultant on Gender Issues Oversight, Presidential Advisory Council for the Equality of Women; and Youssef Mahmoud, Director of the Africa II Division, United Nations Department of Political Affairs. The panel was moderated by Tebatso Future Baleseng (Botswana).

2. Participants affirmed the importance of ensuring women’s full and equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building. The promotion of gender equality and of women’s human rights was seen as integral to the achievement of durable and sustainable peace, and the important roles of men in the promotion of gender equality was underlined.

3. Participants noted that considerable progress had been made at the international level in ensuring the promotion of gender equality and women's equal participation in all aspects of peace processes. Such progress was reflected in the growing number of international commitments, including those contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". The historical significance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, which placed women's perspectives in the centre of the peace process, was underlined.

4. According to participants, significant challenges remained to women's inclusion and full participation in peace processes. Participants were concerned at the continuing absence of women and gender perspectives in conflict prevention. This continuing exclusion of women prevented an effective social, cultural and structural transformation towards more peaceful societies and an environment that was conducive to gender equality. Certain traditional norms, customs and stereotypes constituted obstacles to women's equal participation in peace processes. Participants were also concerned about the absence of — or insufficient — political will, which resulted in lack of action in follow-up to and implementation of international commitments. Different stakeholders lacked capacity to integrate gender perspectives in peace processes, and resources were often not available to support women's effective participation in those processes. It was noted that poverty was a root cause of conflict as well as of gender inequality. Gender equality was also a result of poverty. During conflict and in the post-conflict context, lack of physical security for women limited their freedom of movement and capacity for participation, and the use of sexual violence against women, and trafficking in women continued to be major causes of concern.

5. Peace processes in general and peace accords in particular presented opportunities for the promotion of gender equality and the participation of women. Peace accords, in addition to reflecting attention to gender perspectives and ensuring the participation of women, should call for the creation of effective national machinery for the advancement of women. Such machinery would enable the development of effective gender equality policies and the formulation and proposal of measures to institutionalize women's equal participation in post-conflict countries. Similarly, electoral processes in post-conflict countries were key for achieving women's equal participation in public life. Such elections held particular importance for women as the resulting legislative bodies were commonly entrusted with the development, or revision, of a country's laws and thus directly affected all aspects of women's lives. As conflicts commonly brought about changes in traditional gender roles, it was important to build on this momentum in the peace process to strengthen the empowerment of women and their participation in the reconstruction and development of societies.

6. Participants recognized the important role of solidarity among women, and of women's social movements and networks in the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict within communities. Such networks served as frameworks for enhancing women's capacity to develop a common agenda and have their voices heard in peace processes. The diversity of women and their experiences, needs and contributions were important assets in peace processes. In that regard, participants highlighted the need to overcome the marginalization of particular groups of women in peace

processes, and especially in post-conflict reconstruction. The importance of maintaining effective links with rural women during all phases of peace processes was discussed, as was the need to ensure that the voices of internally displaced women and refugee women were heard. The situation of widows required particular attention, not only as victims of conflict but also as crucial players in reconstruction processes and in the survival of their families. It was suggested that the Secretary-General should be requested to prepare a report on the role of widows in post-conflict reconstruction. Experience highlighted the need to address the specific needs of women in disarmament and reintegration programmes, and to involve them fully in the reconstruction process.

7. Women needed clear, accurate and timely information about the timing and location of formal and informal peace negotiations to allow them to overcome barriers to participation. They needed access to training, particularly in the areas of conflict prevention and peace-building, to enhance their capacity to participate effectively in negotiations. There was also a need to collect sex-disaggregated data and to undertake studies on the situation of women in different countries so as to find better ways for involving women in conflict prevention activities.

8. Participants emphasized that women's participation in political and public life, particularly in decision-making positions at all levels — at the grass-roots, national and international levels — was crucial for strengthening women's equal participation also in the area of peace and security. Participants identified a number of effective tools that could be used in that regard, such as gender-sensitive electoral laws and processes and special measures such as affirmative action, including quotas for women in public and electoral offices, as well as voter education efforts. It was also emphasized that, within the United Nations system, more women should be appointed to senior level positions, in particular as special representatives or special envoys of the Secretary-General. The inclusion of gender advisers in peacekeeping missions and the participation of women in peacekeeping missions, including in command positions, were important for increasing attention to gender equality. At the same time, it was emphasized that the promotion of gender equality in the framework of peace processes was the responsibility of all actors.

9. Participants also highlighted the need to develop a comprehensive approach to combat violence against women and trafficking in situations of conflict, including through the formulation of codes of conduct for peacekeeping personnel and efforts to fight corruption. It was suggested to establish the post of United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking, who would also focus on conflict-related situations. Particular emphasis was placed on the urgency to prosecute violations of women's human rights. The promotion and protection of women's human rights, during conflict and in its aftermath, should be pursued through the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and in the framework of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments of particular relevance to women.

10. Adequate financial resources should be provided to support and sustain women's participation in peace processes and to facilitate consultations and networking among women and women leaders. Donors and funding entities were urged to support women's own efforts and to earmark resources within peacekeeping budgets to support women's initiatives on the ground. Within national budgets, resources should be allocated to support the development and functioning of

institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. It was suggested that financial resources should be redirected from arms programmes towards development programmes, particularly in support of women's access to health, education and employment. Participants reiterated the need to mainstream gender perspectives in poverty eradication programmes in order to ensure women's economic empowerment. At the international level, funds should be earmarked in support of programmes targeted at women in conflict situations, and more efforts were needed to effectively mainstream gender perspectives in the work of the United Nations, particularly in the areas of peace, development and humanitarian assistance.

11. Since the causes and effects of conflicts transcended national borders, the need for regional and international cooperation in all phases of peace processes was emphasized. Such cooperation was also essential for the implementation of international commitments to the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women in the framework of peace and electoral processes.

12. Participants called for concrete action, such as the development of clear and practical strategies to ensure the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Information dissemination should be undertaken and training conducted for different stakeholders, including United Nations personnel, on the gender perspectives of peace processes. Regular briefings should be provided for special representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General and for heads of peacekeeping missions. Awareness-raising and advocacy efforts should be targeted at civil society in general, and at women's organizations in particular. There was also a need to translate relevant documentation and agreements into local languages to make them accessible to women and enhance accountability. Participants stressed the need for better monitoring and accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels as a way to ensure implementation of such commitments.

13. During the discussion, participants provided examples of good practice on ways to integrate gender perspectives in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building. These included: establishment, at the national level, of a gender task force to follow up on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and relevant sections of the Beijing Platform for Action; setting up of a national forum comprising representatives of different ministries and non-governmental organizations to exchange ideas on issues related to gender equality and peace; implementation of affirmative action policies to ensure women's political participation; development of education curricula to promote a culture of peace; and support to civil society organizations for their work with women affected by conflict.